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**Social identity, learning and social interaction in multi-cultural groups of students : case studies from Master's courses in E.L.T. (English language teaching) in Britain**

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**SOCIAL IDENTITY, LEARNING AND SOCIAL INTERACTION  
IN MULTI-CULTURAL GROUPS OF STUDENTS:  
CASE STUDIES FROM MASTER'S COURSES IN ELT (ENGLISH  
LANGUAGE TEACHING) IN BRITAIN**

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**Thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements  
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## ABSTRACT

The thesis examines the relationship between concepts of language and concepts of learning and identity in relation to English language teaching and learning in higher education institutions in Britain. It contributes to a more complex understanding of the socially constructed and contested meanings and institutional and epistemological discourses that both international and home Master's students, and their lecturers, bring to their teaching and learning encounters.

The case study recognises and builds on the insight and expertise that Master's students, who are themselves professional teachers, can contribute to our understanding of the 'gaps' that appear to exist between lecturers' and students' expectations which, if inadvertently, may create and perpetuate bias and unequal classroom structures. The ethnographic-style approach to the study has opened up innovative avenues that can create pedagogical spaces that help foster the self-development of students and teachers/lecturers. The interviews and the focus group discussion that were set up for the study, while having a research function, also took on a pedagogic function as the students were given space to formulate and reflexively examine their perspectives.

The thesis proposes a shift away from concepts of 'appropriateness' and language 'competence' towards concepts of 'contribution' and genuine dialogue in classrooms and academic assignments. Connecting language and language use to students' and teachers'/lecturers' identities and the social relationships and contexts they are part of, the thesis provides telling cases which speak to conceptualisations of discourses as 'identity kits' and argues the crucial role of 'uptake' of students' contributions and narrative forms of knowledge. Pedagogical spaces need to be created that encourage and enable students, and lecturers, to critically and reflexively examine teaching and learning as institutionally and epistemologically embedded practices. The thesis makes a contribution not only to the academic literacies literature but also to that on pedagogy in English language teaching.

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Appendices have been numbered in the following way:

The *first* number indicates the chapter in which they first appear in the thesis.

The *second* number indicates the sequence in which they appear in that chapter.

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **WHERE THE STUDY IS COMING FROM**

**As for what motivated me, it is quite simple; I would hope that in the eyes of some people it might be sufficient in itself. It was curiosity - the only kind of curiosity, in any case, that is worth acting upon with a degree of obstinacy: not the curiosity that seeks to assimilate what is proper for one to know, but that which enables one to get free of oneself. After all, what would be the value of passion for knowledge if it resulted only in a certain amount of knowledgeableness and not, in one way or another and to the extent possible, in the knower's straying afield of himself? There are times in life when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks and perceive differently than one sees is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all... But then what is philosophy today - philosophical activity, I mean - if it is not the critical work that thought brings to bear on itself? In what does it consist, if not in the endeavor to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of legitimating what is already known?**

**Michel Foucault quoted in Eribon  
(1993)**

#### **1 Aims and objectives of the study**

Entering higher education at undergraduate or postgraduate level is a step into a place with set expectations that have to be met by those coming in. However, as views of learning are contested and closely bound up with contested views of the nature of language and knowledge, learning and teaching practices in educational institutions may construct identities for learners that are in conflict with how students themselves perceive their identity position and what they can expect to gain from their learning. This thesis will address the complex issue of how Master's students perceive and construct the teaching and learning practices they encounter in relation to the concepts of language and concepts of learning and identity that they bring to their courses. The students in this case study are



themselves teachers/practitioners in the field of (English) language teaching. Yet, to some considerable degree ‘what is going on’ in their classrooms and what is expected of them in their writing and learning on their courses appears to be unfamiliar and difficult to unpack. Geisler (1995) calls on academics to recognise that ‘the relationship between writing and learning is far trickier than is generally acknowledged (p.116)’. The case study will focus on the conceptual link between language, learning and identity in relation to the learning and teaching of English, setting out to ask how this ‘tricky’ and complex relationship between writing, speaking in classrooms and learning can be acknowledged and how current pedagogic practice might take account of it.

The case study recognises and builds on the insight and expertise that MA students, who are themselves professional teachers, can contribute to our understanding of the ‘gaps’ that appears to exist between institutional expectations and student expectations in educational encounters. The study thus is committed to making the students’ voices heard and count. Although students may be constructed in educational encounters as ‘just’ students whose knowledge may only be taken seriously after it has been subjected to regular assessment procedures, the thesis aims to demonstrate that they are also in a position to critically and reflexively examine their own and others’ teaching and learning practices thus filling a gap in current pedagogic practice. The key research interest then is to explore how the expectations that are set up in MA in ELT or TESOL courses in Britain impact on the educational and professional expectations that students bring to such programmes. The study aims to move towards a deeper and more complex understanding of those gaps, in order to illuminate and help explain

why educational institutions do not seem to be places which allow students, as Heath (1983) puts it, to ‘capitalize on the skills, values, and knowledge they brought there, and to add on the conceptual structures’ (1983, p.13) offered by educational institutions. If there are differences in how schools (in Heath’s study) and universities (in this study) view student learning and how individual students approach their learning, these differences need to be taken account of for the learning to be a mutually beneficial effort. The thesis hopes to provoke thought and reflection on common assumptions about classroom practices and student participation, for example the assumption that students who ‘don’t speak anything [...] don’t think anything’ (Maya, 1st interview, page 1; see discussion in chapter five). If, as stated in the *Recommendations on Good Practice in Applied Linguistics* (BAAL, 1994; see also section four below), ‘it is important to take account of equal opportunities issues’ and ‘to be alert to issues arising from inequalities of power between teachers and students’, researchers need to examine the underlying values and beliefs that shape what teachers and students do, or do not do, when they write or speak and listen to each other.

‘If, as it appears, there is a tension between university teachers’ and their students’ perceptions about each other’s purposes, then we need to know about it’ (Rowland, 2002, p.55). As a result of the data itself and of my review of the research literature, the purpose of this case study is to gain insight into teaching and learning as a social practice and to share the research findings with the academic and professional community, which includes the teachers/practitioners who have participated in this study (see section five below). The results of this research will be of interest to those who teach and research in higher education

but also to those who learn in higher education, particularly to those postgraduate students in higher education who are themselves teachers. The case study then aims to recognise and promote ways of studying and learning that would make it possible for students and lecturers studying and teaching on Master's programmes to critically and reflexively examine the teaching and learning practices they engage in but also the theoretical frameworks that underpin those practices. The thesis hopes to make a contribution not only to the academic literacies literature but also to that on pedagogy in ELT (English language teaching).

## **2 The 'foreshadowed problem'**

This study has grown out of my own experience of being a postgraduate student in a multicultural group of students in a British university, studying for a Master's degree in English Language Teaching. In this group I observed that some students were silent while others were talking a lot. The students in the group were native and non-native speakers of English. Most of the lecturers on this Master's course were native speakers of English. I also observed that it seemed to come easy to many, though not all, British students (native speakers of English) to be noticed by lecturers, to get a turn, to get into an ongoing discussion, but also to get out of it. For non-native speakers, I noticed, it took longer to get heard, but also longer to make their point. Whenever I, a non-native speaker of English myself, was thinking of saying something in class, I was thinking of how I could get a turn and how I could get my point across in an appropriate time and way. I noticed that others in the group, non-native *and* native speakers of English, had similar problems. I often found that by the time I was ready to say something, the



argument had moved on. I felt that some students were making sense when they were speaking, but others were not.

From my observations, I came up with a lot of questions and interpretations of what was going on. I felt that those who did not speak in class got constructed by other students as not knowing, or as having a deficit of some kind. This deficit, it seemed, was seen as the reason why they did not participate in discussions. But, the way I perceived it, it was not the case that the students who did not speak in class did not know anything. They just did not speak in class and I began to wonder why. Another observation was that students, both non-native and native speakers of English, did not really know what the expectations were about the writing assignments given to us. We had been informed that standards were high at Master's level in British universities and we had been given criteria for the interpretation of grades of our written work (see Appendix 1.1). These criteria specified what was expected for work to be judged as excellent, very good, average, below average, or as a fail in terms of specific criteria such as 'evidence of originality of thought', 'synthesis of views' and 'clearly articulated argument'. However, it appeared to be taken for granted that students would know how to achieve a 'clearer organisation', a 'clearer line of argument', or 'clearer expression of [y]our ideas in English'. The lecturers' expectation seemed to be that students would aspire to write up to British standards, but what kinds of processes students had to go through in order to write at the expected level had not been spelled out or discussed. From my observations of taught classes on the Master's programme, I came to be interested in students on MA courses in ELT (English Language Teaching) or TESOL (Teaching of English to Speakers of

Other Languages) as a group. I also became interested in what was judged to be ‘appropriate’ or ‘competent’ speaking or writing, an issue which this case study also addresses (see chapter four).

For my Master’s dissertation (Hermerschmidt, 1993), I decided to look back at the teaching and learning that we had encountered on the MA programme and to look at what had been going on in our group, in and out of our classrooms. I wanted to give meaning to what was going on and find out about the expectations that students brought to their Master’s course, about their perceptions of the learning and teaching going on, and about what they thought it was they were going to take away. In ethnographic-style research there is what Malinowski called a ‘foreshadowed problem’ (in Roberts et al., 2001, p.145), a problem or issue that the researcher in the field sets out to explore in order to deepen our understanding of that research issue. In other words, in my Master’s project I set out to ‘shed light on’ some of the tensions that appeared to exist between assumptions of students and lecturers on MA in ELT or TESOL programmes such as assumptions about language, or ‘competent speakers’ or ‘fluent writers’. While students are assessed and judged by lecturers and other students, they also assess and judge themselves, not just each other. As Hewitt (1992) put it,

that language and identity are frequently linked is commonly acknowledged but the depth and breadth of this linkage has hardly been recognised or tapped (Hewitt, 1992, pp.12-13).

The aim of the project was to understand more of the complexities of this interconnectedness between assumptions about language and learning and constructions of students’ identity position, a research issue that will also be



pursued in this case study (see chapter five and six). For my MA dissertation, I interviewed some of the students in my group at Riverside University<sup>1</sup> but also students on a similar Master's programme at Central University<sup>2</sup>, collecting data on what they had to say about their learning experience on their courses. I talked to lecturers at both institutions, collecting data on their expectations of Master's students. I also observed classes at both universities and took notes on my observations. In my dissertation *Hierarchy vs. Belonging. An Ethnographic Study of a Group of MA Students* (Hermerschmidt, 1993), I argued that students who study on Master's courses in multicultural groups in British universities have to cope with multifaceted tensions that grow out of the complex nature of the link between language and identity and underlying assumptions about language and learning which hardly ever got addressed on the Master's programme. In line with Hewitt (1992; see above), the findings suggested that language and identity are indeed connected. I argued that the set hierarchical structures that students face in their learning interfere with their aim to understand and take on board the 'rules of the game' on their course and with their desire to belong to their professional field. For my MA dissertation, however, I had not been in a position to look into the complexity of this connection in the depth and breadth necessary. I realised that, if I wanted to be able to address a research issue of such a complex nature, I had to collect further data, further develop my epistemological framework and take a methodological approach that would enable me to 'tap' and take account of some of that complexity (see chapter two and three): this is what led me to undertake this PhD.

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<sup>1</sup> Riverside University is a pseudonym to protect the anonymity of the students who participated in this study

<sup>2</sup> Central University is a pseudonym (see also Footnote 1)

### **3 The significance of the research question: challenging bias, inequalities and hierarchies**

Over the past decade, a growing number of studies into academic writing and learning have examined the gap that appears to exist between students' expectations of their learning experience in higher education and lecturers' expectations of their students' learning and insights into what is expected of them. These studies have focused on both home students (Cohen, 1993; Lea, 1994; Mitchell, 1996; Lea and Street, 1997, 2000; Ivanič, 1998; Lea and Street 1999; Francis et al., 2001; Lillis, 1999, 2001; Read et al., 2003) and overseas, or international, students (Zamel, 1998; Benesch, 1999, 2001; Ridley, 2004). Ridley (2004), whose research identifies 'potential gaps in expectations', particularly for 'students coming from cultural and language backgrounds that are different to those underpinning the dominant ideologies of higher education institutions (2004, p.91)' in Britain, asserts that numerous recent studies highlighted

the alienation that international and non-traditional students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds can feel when trying to make sense of higher education conventions and expectations (2004, p.92).

These studies draw on insights developed through the New Literacy Studies (Street, 1984; Barton, 1994; Street, 1996; Gee, 1996; Street 2000, 2005) which emphasise the social nature of language and learning and examine the institutional contexts within which norms and expectations are embedded. The insights provided by this body of research have also been momentous for the development

of the conceptual framework of this case study (see chapter two). Lea and Street (1997, 2000), for example, developed an *analytic* model, or lens, of three perspectives on student writing in higher education, which differentiates between a *study skills approach*, an *academic socialisation approach* and an *academic literacies approach* to writing and learning in higher education. These different perspectives are underpinned by different assumptions about the nature of language and language learning. From a ‘study skills’ perspective, literacy (writing, speaking, listening, and reading) is taught and learned in terms of ‘transparent’ and ‘transferable’ skills. From an ‘academic socialisation’ perspective, academic writing is learned and taught in terms of an ‘apprenticeship’ into disciplinary fields or areas of study. From an ‘academic literacies’ perspective, writing, learning and teaching are understood to be social practices, which are embedded in identities, relationships of power and practices of knowledge construction. I will return to Lea and Street’s model in chapter four *Gaps in perceptions of ‘appropriateness’ and language ‘competence’* and chapter five *‘Contribution’ – a contested practice in the university* for the purpose of analysing and discussing the ways in which these different perspectives underpin and can contribute to creating a gap in students’ and lecturers’ perceptions and expectations of their learning and teaching encounters.

Here Lea and Street’s analytic model, or lens, can help us begin to examine some of the literature on student learning in a changing higher education context in Britain and other western education systems. The need to explore and examine reflexively what students perceive to be ‘natural’, ‘common sense’, ‘familiar’ teaching and learning practices has become more urgent in view of the fact that a



‘controlled explosion’ has been taking place for the last decade (THES 30 Sept 1994). As a result of this explosion in the number of students coming to pursue an education in Britain, overseas students are no longer ‘objects of charity’ but have ‘become customers, forced to buy education at the going rate (THES 30 Sept 1994)’. John Blackwell, the development adviser to the British Council and chairman of the Education and Training Export Committee, made a case for the ‘overseas involvement’ of higher education institutions as ‘it helps to ensure that we in this country play a leading role in the rapid internationalisation of education (THES 16 Sept 1994)’. However, his argument that overseas involvement ‘enriches the academic and social life of our campuses’ appears rather weak in the light of the illuminating economic fact that ‘the British education and training export sector is one of Britain’s largest earners of overseas influence and revenue (THES 16 Sept 1994)’. A recent study concludes that ‘UK education and training is worth more than £10 billion a year in the global marketplace [...]. Higher education accounts for more than £4 billion of this’ (THES 23 April 2004).

Turner (2004) aptly observes, ‘the financial viability of British universities is increasingly dependent on their marketability to what are known as ‘overseas’ or ‘international’ students (2004, p.96)’. Education then has become a commodity in a market increasingly competitive for home *and* overseas students. Drawing on Barnett and Griffin (1997), Street (2004) argues that

‘quality’ in the commercial sense, now being applied to education, refers to the object of knowledge itself but not to the process of learning, questioning and engagement [...]. The critical perspective of university approaches to knowledge is less important than whether it will sell in the marketplace (Street, 2004, p.13).

It is this ‘critical perspective of university approaches to knowledge’ that appears to be missing in many studies which have addressed the impact of this ‘explosion’ in numbers of overseas students on the landscape of British and other ‘western’ higher education institutions. Studies have focused on the perceived language problems of overseas students and academic and other areas of support such as overseas students’ adjustment to life in the host country (Reed, 1978; Channell, 1990; Elsey, 1990; Hughes, 1990; Kinnell, 1990). Others focused on the potential benefits to the host country’s host institutions (Althen, 1981; Shotness, 1985; Overseas Student Trust and UK Council for Overseas Student Affairs, 1990) because, as a result of this explosion, ‘internationalisation has become a banner for universities to wave a claim to quality and relevance’ (Stacy, 1999, p.76). While most of these studies acknowledge that there is sometimes a mismatch in expectations of students and expectations of educational institutions, they are conceptually framed within a study skills approach to learning in higher education aiming to help overseas students adjust to their new learning environment.

In this thesis I will argue – in keeping with Lea and Street (1997, 2000) – that a study skills perspective, which assumes a transparent nature of language, cannot provide the analytic tools necessary to examine underlying and often taken-for-granted assumptions about students’ perceived ‘problems’ and ‘needs’. This point is supported by an unnamed author (Anonymous, 1993) who observed:

Many [overseas students] are aware they may have difficulties with the English language per se, but in my experience, they are often unprepared for the other (and more significant) problems which with [*sic*] a substantial number end up struggling. These problems are less about language mechanics than about unfamiliarity with genres like the essay and exam



essay, the research project, the seminar discussion, and so on’  
(Anonymous in BAAL Newsletter, 1993, p.24).

Lea’s and Street’s (1999) study of textual practices in higher education does not specifically focus on how overseas students make sense of what is expected of them in ‘genres like the essay and exam essay, the research report’ or other kinds of written assignments. However, their point that for students ‘it is difficult to “read off” how to make sense of [the] different forms of documentation about writing to which they are exposed’ (Lea and Street, 1999, p.64) is relevant here because it is precisely such ‘gaps’ that this case study pursues. In addition, as writing is the main form of assessment in British higher education, students may find it difficult to cope with the pressure of constantly writing for assessment while, on the other hand, their contributions in classroom discussions may not count as much as they might expect. Furthermore, Lea and Street’s point is not exclusive to either home or international students, nor is it exclusive of what students experience in other than their written work. In other words, international *and* home students find it difficult to ‘read off’ what is expected in both written and oral academic genres such as written ‘assignments’ or classroom ‘contributions’ (see discussions in chapter five, six and seven). The ‘gaps’ then do not relate to ‘language problems’ but to issues embedded in broader notions of academic literacies (Lea and Street, 1997, 2000), Discourses (Gee, 1996) and identities (Ivanič, 1998), which will be further discussed below and in chapter two.

While lecturers do their best on a day-to-day basis to guide and instruct their *home and overseas* students, limited institutional resources and high pressure on

academic staff to publish put constraints on their efforts. According to (Elsay, 1990),

the assumption has been that it is the professional duty of academics to pay proper attention to teaching and learning, for all kinds of students, not just those from overseas. Indeed, overseas students illustrate a major problem in university life for it is quite clear that teaching and learning do not have as much priority in the academic mind as research and publication, the traditional hallmarks of success in a career profile (Elsay, 1990, p.62).

Channell (1990) adds that this dilemma that lecturers face requires that students would be 'tuned in to what they will *actually* find in the British system (1990, p.80; her emphasis)'. It appears that most studies that have been undertaken to address these challenges from the point of 'institutional adjustment' also take a study skills or an academic socialisation approach, focusing mainly on adjustment to the perceived 'needs' of students. Makepeace (1989), for example, alerts 'all staff [...] to the need for sensitivity when communicating with overseas students so that they may offer appropriate help (1989, p.21)' but also observes that problems may indeed be faced by any student, not just overseas students:

There are however major problem areas to which not all home students are prone: culture shock, racial prejudice and loneliness, and language difficulties; although if one interviewed mature students or indeed any students, these problems might be far more common than we suppose' (Makepeace, 1989, pp.21-22).

Althen (1981) makes a related point to an audience of readers involved in educational interchange. He writes:

Moving to a new culture is a complex experience. As they enter a new culture, people bring with them a complicated set of culturally-based

assumptions, values, perceptions, and ways of behaving. Confronted with an alternative set of sets of assumptions, values, and so on, people who go abroad are usually forced to examine the 'cultural baggage' they brought with them, and to decide, whether consciously or not, how much of that baggage they want to use, how much they want to discard, and how much they want to put into storage for later. This experience can be very trying or very exhilarating; for most people it is both (Althen, 1981, p.5).

Two significant aspects of these studies indicate their limitations in the context of this case study which will address issues that 'moving to a new culture' raises for international *and* home students when they enter, or re-enter, higher education as postgraduate students. First, many of these studies that have been undertaken to 'increase the amount of enlightenment that arises from intercultural encounters' (Althen, 1981, p.1) take an academic socialisation and 'problem-solving' perspective. Their aim is to guide and assist educational exchange practitioners in matters pertinent to their work with students who need to find their way in a new and unfamiliar educational and cultural context and who may be 'forced to examine the "cultural baggage" they brought with them'. 'Moving to a new culture' is conceptualised in terms of processes of socialisation and acculturation to this new culture. The 'new culture' is conceptualised as homogenous and monolithic, so is the 'cultural baggage' some of which students might 'want to use, [...] discard, [...] or put in storage for later'. Such a perspective does not have the scope to tap 'what goes on' in these complex encounters and relationships.

Second, studies on groups of students, studying in a multicultural educational context in higher education in Britain and in other 'western' educational contexts, often focus mainly on overseas students and not on overseas *and* home students (Althen, 1981; Kinnell, 1990; Ryan and Zuber-Skerritt, 1999). Elsey (1990) points out,



any relationship between teachers and learners is bound to be complex. The needs and expectations of overseas students generate special difficulties and demands for university teachers. [...] But it is also worthwhile noting that perhaps overseas students are not that more difficult to teach than mature students returning to full-time study after several years of working or conventional-age students with no real experience of life to call upon. The point of difference is relative and difficult to define precisely. Because overseas students are arriving in greater numbers than hitherto and from countries with little previous connection with British education it is inevitable that they should be viewed as separate and different and presenting special problems for those who teach them. Yet the point could be stretched too far (Elsey, 1990. p.57).

Elsey's observation that the point of 'difficulties and demands' made on university teachers by *overseas* students could be exaggerated and 'stretched too far' is itself a point that is central to this thesis as overseas *and* home students face challenging demands in a higher education context.

Studies that have been undertaken specifically into postgraduate education and training, according to Lea and Street (1997, 2000), also often take an academic socialisation approach with a view to improving student writing in different disciplinary contexts. Torrance and Thomas (1994), for example, studying the development of writing skills in doctoral research students and looking in more detail into the nature of writing problems, concluded: 'Since stylistic norms vary considerably from discipline to discipline, instruction for students studying within the same discipline could be tailored more closely to their particular needs (1994, p.120)'. Such an approach assumes that by identifying and targeting 'particular needs' through 'tailored' writing instruction students can be inculcated into the norms and expectations of their specific discipline or field. Hockey (1994) focused on full-time PhD students who, in his words, occupy 'the position of

novice researcher' (Hockey, 1994, p.177). In his view, in their first year social science PhD students have to acquiesce their 'intellectual self' towards the 'departmental self' (Hockey, 1994, p.183) in order to 'fit in' and to show that they have been properly socialised and that they have 'adjusted' to the expectations of academic life in their departments. Burgess, Pole and Hockey (1994) examined the relationship between doctoral research students in the social sciences and their supervisors who, in several cases, described the 'supervisor-student role in terms of an apprenticeship' (Burgess, Pole and Hockey, 1994, p.31). Parry, Atkinson and Delamont (1994) were also 'interested in how expert knowledge is defined, produced and reproduced in sites of academic socialisation' (1994, p.35) and focused on doctoral work as a process of initiation and apprenticeship towards becoming a full member of a particular 'disciplinary culture' or 'research culture' (p.40). Their focus on 'initiation' and 'apprenticeship' appears to presume a reified notion of 'academic identity':

the process of postgraduate research also involves the acquisition of academic identity, realised through identification with intellectual traditions and groupings, with departments or disciplines, academic peer groups, networks and learned societies (1994, p.36). [...] The importance of academic identity is that it informs the way in which disciplinary work is conceived and carried out (Parry, Atkinson and Delamont, 1994, p.49).

However, Parry, Atkinson and Delamont's study makes an important contribution to our understanding of how social science disciplines and intellectual traditions differ across the academic spectrum. For example, they quote an anthropology PhD student whose insight seems particularly pertinent. He

describes the way in which anthropology differs from other social science disciplines in the focus of its essential interests:



If you take a thing like pig husbandry you would think it was a very straightforward thing. As an agriculturist or an economist you will think there is such a thing as pig husbandry, and we do it in a certain way. I'm going to find out how they do it and that's it. And I think as an anthropologist you have to do this, but you have to go one step further in trying to understand why they do it in the way they do it. Their rationale behind it and what kind of model of husbandry they have. And this is not done by any other discipline even if they work with the same issues underground. The anthropological understanding goes beyond that (Parry, Atkinson and Delamont, 1994, p.41).

This student's insight then enables us to recognise the differences in how agriculturists, economists, or anthropologists approach research issues, working from different disciplinary frameworks and assumptions (see also chapter four, section two). His view appears to be in line with Geisler (1994), who argues that

we simply cannot make real sense out of the literacy practices of the academy unless we understand how the institutionalized forces of professionalization are played out in the minute practices of individual practitioners as they read and write (Geisler, 1994, p.94)

In the context of this thesis, expanding Geisler's argument to include speaking and listening, I would suggest that there is a need to explore the literacy practices of practitioners in the institutional and epistemological context in which they operate. This case study then aims to make a contribution to our understanding of the contested nature of reading, writing, speaking and listening practices and the conflicting ways in which students and lecturers give meaning to literacy practices in higher education in general, and on MA in ELT or TESOL courses in particular (see also chapter two). While recognising that the literacy practices of the academy may construct MA students as 'apprentices' and 'novices' who have to adjust to the expectations of their academic departments and fields, this thesis builds on the MA students expertise and insights as professionals who can make a

valuable contribution to our understanding of ‘how the institutionalized forces of professionalization are played out’ in this particular higher education context (see also chapter three).

#### **4 The research question**

The increasing financial pressure on universities in Britain to recruit ever larger numbers of overseas students (THES 23 April 2004) and widening ‘non-traditional’ participation in higher (and postgraduate) education have created a more and more international and diverse student body and university classrooms have become ‘multicultural’. However, the different educational, professional and language experiences and expectations that both international and home students and their lecturers bring to their courses and how these impact on their day-to-day teaching and learning practices have not yet sufficiently been researched. This question needs to be asked in the light of the hidden, if unintended, bias and cultural discrimination that can be observed in face-to-face interaction in and outside of classrooms. The following two quotes from students who participated in my MA dissertation project can help illustrate this unintended bias and discrimination. The first student, a native speaker of English studying at Central University, commented in her interview on the way in which non-native English speaking students may be at a disadvantage not only because their first language is not English but also because they are outsiders to the British educational landscape. She explains:

For this particular type of course, I knew there were students from other countries, I was expecting tutors to be a little more sympathetic to students

from other countries. I thought there was a more multicultural aspect to the course. I was shocked, really shocked to see how British it is [...], even the examples that are used, everything is very British [...]. And Professor A., he is terribly British, [...] he then eventually, after he used the example, he then will explain what those things are, but for a person whose language isn't English [...] they missed the gist, if you see what I mean [...] so they have a further disadvantage (student quoted in Hermerschmidt, 1993, pp.56-57).

The second student, a non-native speaker studying at Riverside University, commented in his interview on the hierarchical structure of classroom interaction:

Whatever good intention lecturers might have had, this thing of in the class sometimes using native speakers as referees and players at the same time, it suddenly creates a sort of hierarchy that immediately comes out and people begin to realise [...] we've got the lecturers up there, we've got the native speakers up there, and we've got me here – down there. So while at the same time I feel I'm a player with everybody else in the class, but I'm suddenly subjected to a place whereby I feel I've got referees that are playing with me. [...] So whatever good intentions the lecturers might have, it would be wise to realise that the students in the class are all students, and have got to be placed in the same category, not to subject others to that kind of inferiority feeling, or even if they don't feel it, to realise that somebody has placed me in the back of her mind in a lower level, whatever I do, whatever I say, I've been placed somewhere (student quoted in Hermerschmidt, 1993, p.34).

As these students' observation demonstrate, educational encounters may, albeit unconsciously, be a source of bias and perceptions of hierarchical classroom structures. Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz (1982) explain: 'Although on the surface an air of equality, mutuality, and cordiality prevails, participant roles, i.e. the right



to speak and the obligation to answer, are predetermined or at least strictly constrained' (Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz, 1982, p.9). As Burn and Finnigan (2003) demonstrate, academic institutions maintain complex barriers through their norms and conventions of language use and can thus perpetuate hierarchical social structures. In her book *Verbal Hygiene*, Deborah Cameron (1995) makes an even stronger point about unequal encounters in and outside of classrooms:

Linguistic bigotry is among the last publicly expressible prejudices left to members of the western intelligentsia. Intellectuals who would find it unthinkable to sneer at a beggar or someone in a wheelchair will sneer without compunction at linguistic 'solecism' (Cameron, 1995, p.12).

Similarly, Bauer and Trudgill (1998) observe that 'in an age when discrimination in terms of race, colour, religion or gender is not publicly acceptable, the last bastion of overt social discrimination will continue to be a person's use of language (1998, pp.64-65)'.

More than twenty years ago, Mestenhauser (1981, p.124) recommended that educational exchange practitioners should work to eliminate even 'low level ethnocentric' rejection of foreign students and 'help create conditions for acceptance of foreign students as partners in learning'. Another student whom I interviewed for my MA dissertation project, a native English speaker studying at Riverside University, might have benefited from such recommendations. The student commented: 'I didn't expect there to be so many [...]. I knew that there would be some non-native speakers [...] but it never really occurred to me that it would be, what was it: five natives, sixteen or seventeen non-natives, that was quite a surprise (Extract of student interview)'. She continued:



If you come to a British university you probably assume that most of the people on your course are going to be British as well. Uh, [...] I don't mean to be, I don't want that to sound, you know, racist or disparaging, or anything, it was just a shock to find so many (student quoted in Hermerschmidt, 1993, p.56).

This student who 'didn't expect there to be so many' non-native students at a British University appears *not* to accept non-British students 'as partners in learning', a view that is in stark contrast to the two students, quoted above, who expressed grave concerns about the hierarchical and exclusionary classroom structures they had experienced. It is to this background that the *Recommendations on Good Practice in Applied Linguistics*, drawn up by the British Association for Applied Linguistics (BAAL, 1994) acquire new poignancy and urgency. The section on *Responsibilities to Students* states:

It is important to take account of equal opportunity issues, to be alert to issues arising from inequalities of power between teachers and students, and to ensure that students are treated on the basis of their abilities and potential, regardless of their gender, 'race', religion, sexual orientation, physical disability, family circumstances or other *irrelevant factors* (BAAL, 1994, p.5; my emphasis).

Teachers and lecturers need to treat students with respect, regardless of whether they are women or men, regardless of whether they are black or white, regardless of their religious affiliations, regardless of the personal circumstances of students. However, while these recommendations clearly have the aim of reminding educational institutions of their obligation to provide equal opportunities for all students and that difference should not warrant judgements, it seems unfortunate that the wording 'irrelevant factors' in the BAAL document could be misunderstood to mean that any of the markers of difference could be seen as

irrelevant to the teaching process. This is particularly unhelpful in the light of views such as expressed by the student who was shocked to find so many non-British students on her Master's course (see above). In fact, the Recommendations themselves state that

applied linguistic research has amply demonstrated (that) face to face interaction often perpetrates quite subtle forms of unintended bias and discrimination: it is important to avoid these in applied linguistics teaching (BAAL, 1994, p.6).

While it is vital that recommendations on good practice such as those issued by BAAL raise awareness of tensions and unwarranted judgements that may flair up in multicultural learning environments, they cannot further our understanding of how students and lecturers might uncover and challenge assumptions and values that underlie racist and disparaging, if hedged, comments such as the one made by the Master's student above. This case study aims to generate such insight and understanding. Griffiths (1998) notes that

getting started in educational research may be a matter of: having an issue to explore; a feeling that more knowledge is needed in some area; a chance to investigate an area which matters; a wish to study a crucial question; a desire to get to grips with a pressing practical problem (1998, p.105).

In order to address issues of unintended bias and discrimination and of subtle inequalities that can be embedded in classroom interaction, there appears to be a need to ask questions about how participants in learning and teaching encounters perceive and reflect on what is going on and what is being said. There seems to be a need to ask questions about the tension that appears to exist between the literacy practices that feel natural and familiar to some students and lecturers but not to

others. There is, therefore, a need to explore differences and ‘gaps’ in expectations that students and lecturers bring to their classrooms that, if inadvertently, may create and perpetuate hierarchical classroom structures, inequalities and bias.

The central concern, then, that this case study addresses is how we might gain a deeper and more complex understanding of the meanings and underlying discourses that both international *and* home Master’s students, and their lecturers, bring to their teaching and learning encounters. The concept of *discourses* employed here draws on Foucault’s (1978) notion that

we must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and the dominated one; but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies (Foucault, 1978, p.100).

While insights into ‘accepted and excluded’ discourses, or ‘dominant’ and ‘dominated’ ones are relevant, the aim here is *not* to reinforce dichotomies but to unpack the ‘multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies’ that both students and lecturers employ in their day-to-day teaching and learning practices. The study seeks to better understand the ways in which these strategies and practices are embedded in theoretical frameworks that underpin students’ and lecturers’ views on language and learning and to understand how the conceptual tools available or *unavailable* to students and lecturers may constrain or even hinder access to alternative discursive constructions of their expectations and identity positions (see also chapter two and chapter six). This case study asks what implications such deeper insights might

have for current pedagogic practice on Master's courses but also on the participant MA students future (or parallel) teaching practice in the field of ELT or TESOL. The tension that, according to Rowland (section one above), appears to exist between the purposes that underpin lecturers' and students' teaching and learning practices not only makes it imperative that we 'know about it' (Rowland, 2002, p.55) but also that we challenge the bias, inequalities and hierarchies that may result from it.

This is not a study of overseas students in British universities. It is a study of how international *and* home students, non-native *and* native speakers of English, try to make sense of institutional and their own literacy and learning practices. This, then, is not a study about students having 'language problems'. It is a study of the conceptual frameworks underpinning language and learning that students and lecturers bring to and develop on their Master's courses. It is a study of whether and how much space is created on MA courses to explore and negotiate what is being learned (and taught). The study aims to challenge simplistic notions of learning in a multicultural group. The research issue, therefore, is not how to counsel students who might not be able to cope with their studies or who complain about their courses. Rather, the study recognises and draws on the students' insights, their perceptions and experience as learners and as teachers/practitioners from a variety of cultural and educational backgrounds as a resource for theory development about the link between concepts of language and concepts of learning and identity in higher education.



## 5 Researcher and research participants

The identity positions of the research participants in this case study is complex (see also chapter three, section two and five). The participant MA students know how to teach and how to manage a classroom but on their courses they are assessed as students. They think of themselves as proficient speakers of English but what they say and write on their MA courses is being judged by the standards of native speakers of English in a British higher education institution. They have been insiders to educational institutions and practices for the most part of their lives but they are outsiders and newcomers to Riverside University and Central University, the higher education institution where they study for a Master's degree. My identity as student-cum-researcher-cum-lecturer is also complex: it has shifted as I was moving in *and* out of the researched group (see chapter three, section two) but also changed over the period of this case study (see chapter seven). As a former MA student at Riverside University, now enrolled as a research student at a different institution, I am one of the researched group. I am in the know of how incompetent students feel at times when we struggle to get our writing done and when there is a sense of not knowing how to say what we want to say and how to write what we want to write. Having completed my Master's course but continuing as a student researcher, I went back into groups of MA students to do research 'on' the group. This research gave me 'access' to MA classrooms to do participant observations and gave me the authority to 'collect' and analyse data (see chapter three).

My biography as a researcher had begun when I started on my Master's degree research project. My research question and interest, however, have a longer history as they have grown out of my intellectual and personal biography. As Ivanič (1998) asserts,

Each word we write represents an encounter, possibly a struggle, between our multiple past experience and the demands of a new context. Writing is not some neutral activity which we just learn like a physical skill, but it implies every fibre of the writer's multifaceted being. Who we are affects how we write, whatever we are writing, whether it is a letter to a friend or a dissertation (Ivanič, 1998, pp.181-182).

Ivanič's argument that 'writing is not some neutral activity [...] but implies every fibre of the writer's multifaceted being' resonate with my own experience of writing my MA dissertation. In the introductory section *What does it feel like to be an MA student* I wrote:

To me, the course is a challenge that I wanted to take to find out about myself, as I think people, [...] teachers in particular, should question themselves from time to time to allow for development, if possible. The Berlin Wall, which was a wall in too many people's minds (and the remains are still there), had prevented me from doing a course of studies in London earlier in my life. I wanted to use this 'freedom of moving' to find out about things by doing them rather than thinking of doing them. I think I wanted to cross the boundaries that you need to go beyond in order to see what you can or cannot do, to see who you are. I use the word boundaries (Cohen, 1988) here with its symbolic significance as a cutting off point marking similarity and difference. I took the right that, for political reasons I had been deprived of, to leave Berlin for one year, in order to see how I was able to cope with studying and living in London. During the first weeks into the course I felt like being at risk of falling, like walking along a steep coast: you are safe up there until you, maybe, fall. Nobody

pushed me, or sent me to take this risk, nor did anybody pay for the travel expenses except for my family whom I had put at risk as well. That is to say that the papers we had to write had to prove more than just writing 'up to British standards'. I wanted to prove myself, to see my qualities (if there were any), and limitations. The feelings of MA students about coming on the course are unique, but there are patterns to be seen in what they experienced (Hermerschmidt, 1993, pp.4-5).

I had taught English and English for Academic Purposes at a university in Berlin for most of my professional life before coming to Britain to study for a Master's degree. I had been interested in pedagogic issues and was concerned that often the way language was taught did not generate in learners the confidence in speaking or writing they were aiming for. While on the MA course students shared information about their 'context' or 'background', there was not enough, I felt, space created for students and lecturers to bring those different contexts and experiences to the fore in such a way that hidden and taken-for-granted assumptions about English and English language teaching could be unearthed. Teaching, speaking, writing, I felt, are not 'neutral' activities. Neither are there 'neutral' research questions (see also chapter three, section five). Although my observations and my own perceptions have informed the study, this thesis is not an autobiographical description of my experience of being a Master's student, or a research student. The thesis does not represent *my* experience but I have been one of the people in the group whose lived experience is being represented here.

I had access to the 'identity kit' (Gee, 1996) of MA students and my ways of acting and talking were being recognized by the MA students in this study. We had access to each other's Discourses. Gee explains that



‘Discourse’ is always more than just language. Discourses are ways of being in the world, or forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, and social identities, as well as gestures, glances, body positions, and clothes. A Discourse is a sort of identity kit which comes complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk, and often write, so as to take on a particular social role that others will recognize (1996, p.127).

When Blanche told me in her second interview (see chapter three, section three) that I had ‘won (her) over’ to participate in this case study because ‘things you said in class showed that you [...] had a lot of good insights’ appears to suggest that she had recognised my ‘identity kit’ when I came to her MA classes as a participant observer (see also chapter two).

Using myself as a research tool has meant that I have moved in and out of the researched group not only with reference to my identity position and time but also as a means to distance myself from the data for analytical purposes (see also chapter three, section two). In designing and conducting the study I was sensitive to the power relations at play in the research context, particularly to the research participants’ status as students who were still being assessed on their courses. In the interviews I was concerned not to pin down any student by asking questions that might have been seen as potentially threatening, like questions about their perceptions of the institution, of power relationships between themselves and their tutors, or about their identity. I was also aware, while conducting the interviews in the initial stages of this study, that I myself was enrolled as a research student at Riverside University. The decisions I have made while doing the research and writing the thesis, including the decision to transfer to another university, also impacted on the writing of this thesis. As Ivanič (1998) points out,



individuals are constrained in their selection of discourses by those to which they have access, and by the patterns of privileging which exists among them, but this does not dry up the alternatives altogether (Ivanič, 1998, p.23).

The ‘selection of discourses’ that were available to me while writing this case study has changed and thereby shifted the scope for data analysis and theory construction. While I did experience ‘long silences on paper’ (see chapter seven for a self-reflexive account of the research process), I was also ‘straying afield of (my)self’ (Foucault quoted in Eribon, 1993) and moving into new fields and Discourses that had been unavailable to me as a linguist, a language teacher. (For a discussion of how the un/availability of discourses constrained the participant MA students’ knowledge and identity construction, see also chapter six.) As Lareau and Shultz (1996) observe,

unlike survey research, where a large number of persons review and adjust the research ‘instrument’, in participant-observation the person is the ‘instrument’. How a researcher acts in the field shapes the contours of the results (1996, p.4).

Consequently, my being the ‘instrument’ and the Discourses to which I did, or did not, have access to while I was undertaking this research impacted on the ways in which the thesis has been shaped and re-shaped. The implications of my shifting identities, from being one of the group to pursuing my research agenda and constructing knowledge about the group, and the ways in which this has facilitated and shaped but also constrained the study will be discussed in chapter three and chapter seven.

## 6 Key epistemological and methodological perspectives

This case study has been constructed within a qualitative/interpretivist research frame which assumes that social reality and social identity are constructions (Guba and Lincoln, 1985; Cameron et al, 1992) rather than ‘reality’ or the ‘truth’ (see chapter three, section one). The study seeks to develop a framework that can help us understand how postgraduate students in multicultural groups on MA in ELT or TESOL programmes in British higher education institutions construct and give meaning to the day-to-day teaching and learning practices they encounter in and outside their classrooms. Sara Delamont (1996) reminds us of Howard Becker (1971), who observed:

We may have understated a little the difficulty of observing contemporary classrooms. It is not just the survey method of educational testing or any of those things that keeps people from seeing what is going on. I think, instead, that it is first and foremost a matter of it all being so familiar that it becomes almost impossible to single out events that occur in the classroom as things that have occurred, even when they happen right in front of you. I have not had the experience of observing in elementary and high school classrooms myself, but I have in college classrooms and it takes a tremendous effort of will and imagination to stop seeing only the things that are conventionally ‘there’ to be seen. I have talked to a couple of teams of research people who have sat around in classrooms trying to observe and it is like pulling teeth to get them to see or write anything beyond what ‘everyone’ knows (Becker, 1971, p.10).

Becker’s account resonates with the PhD student’s account above (section three), who explained that in anthropology, ‘if you take a thing like pig husbandry’, you would have to find out ‘how they do it [...] but you have to go one step further in trying to understand why they do it in the way they do it’. In Agar’s (1996) words, you would have to ‘make the familiar strange’ and try to uncover ‘their rationale behind it and what kind of model of husbandry they have’ (PhD student, quoted

above). The case study's objective then is to employ the anthropologist's tool of *making strange* some of the familiar pedagogic practices that may seem obvious to teachers/lecturers – or researchers such as the ones in Becker's account – by drawing on the MA students' insights and experiences and use them analytically to help illuminate some of the teaching and learning practices, in Becker's words, 'beyond what "everyone" knows' and may take for granted. Rather than 'seeing only the things that are conventionally "there" to be seen', the study aims to *unpack* 'familiar' teaching and learning strategies and practices that students and teachers/lecturers routinely engage in on their courses such as participating in, or setting up, group work in order to try and understand *why they do it the way they do it* and to uncover the theoretical models that underpin those activities and practices (see also chapter three, section two). The thesis will demonstrate that there is contestation over the conceptual frameworks that underpin practices such as making a contribution in a classroom discussion (see chapter five) which may explain some of the 'gaps' in lecturers' and students' expectations and purposes (see also chapter four and six).

From this qualitative/interpretivist perspective, then, neither theory nor research are value-free. Researchers as well as research participants (see chapter three, section one) have their views of what constitutes reality and how research into that reality should be undertaken. The epistemological and methodological assumptions then that researchers make about the nature of knowledge and research are at the heart of their decisions about how they approach their research question, how they collect and analyse data. In his introduction to *Understanding*



*social research: perspectives on methodology and practice*, Usher (1997)

observes:

Any research, whether in the natural or social sciences, in making knowledge claims inevitably raises epistemological questions. Very often however these are not made explicit, in fact most of the time they are taken for granted. Most researchers in the social sciences (particularly those at the more quantitative end of the spectrum) tend to think only in terms of *methods* or particular techniques for gathering evidence and very rarely consider the epistemological assumptions of their research. Or if they do, they do so purely in terms of whether they are working 'scientifically' or being sufficiently 'objective'. This is taken as the 'natural' thing to do in research, without any recognition that by so doing certain epistemological assumptions are being implicitly made (Usher, 1997, p.2).

My own intellectual relationship with the discourses employed or rejected in this study has been formed prior to and during my research, but it has also changed in the course of this study as I had more and deeper encounters with anthropological, sociological, critical, and linguistic theories. In chapter three I will discuss how the epistemological framework (chapter two) has shaped and driven my initial observations, my initial questions, and the design of this study. There, I will also discuss how the reflexive methodological approach I have adopted in this case study has enabled me to recursively feed results of initial data analysis into ongoing data collection and further analysis which, ultimately, also broadened the epistemological framework of the thesis. (For a further discussion see also chapter seven *Cycles of adjustment – a reflexive look back and ahead.*)

The study is underpinned by the following broad theoretical perspectives: qualitative and interpretivist conceptualisations of social reality and research (Guba and Lincoln, 1985; Cameron et al, 1992) and poststructuralist feminist



positions on research and pedagogy (Lather, 1991; Gore, 1993; Ellsworth, 1994; Usher, 1997; Griffiths, 1998), interpretations of language as embedded in social practices, Discourses and identities (Street, 1984; Peirce, 1989, 1995; Barton, 1994; Street, 1996; Gee, 1996; Ivanič, 1998; Street 2000, 2005), social theories of learning (Giroux, 1989), and differentiated models of power and knowledge (Foucault, 1980; Geisler, 1994; Luke, 1996a). Adopting a reflexive methodology in the thesis acknowledges the situatedness of the theoretical understanding that the case study aims to develop in the epistemological and methodological perspectives that underpin the study. This view is in line with Foley (2002), who concludes his review of reflexive approaches to ethnographic writing/research: ‘No matter how epistemologically reflexive and systematic our fieldwork is, we must still speak as mere mortals from various historical, culture-bound standpoints; we must still make limited, historically limited knowledge claims (2002, p,487)’. Foley’s argument that claims to knowledge are historically and culturally embedded resonates with Richardson’s (1997) assertion that ‘unlike quantitative work, which can carry its meaning in its tables and summaries, qualitative work depends upon people’s reading it. Just as a piece of literature is not equivalent to its “plot summary”, qualitative research is not contained in its abstract. Qualitative research has to be read, not scanned; its meaning is in the reading (Richardson, 1997, p.87)’. It follows from Richardson’s observation that the task of the reflexive writer/researcher is to offer the reader a comprehensive account of the epistemological and methodological frameworks that have shaped and guided the construction of the study and its findings. While the following section offers an overview of the thesis, the individual chapters that follow will provide a critical and reflexive account of how the thesis has been constructed.

## **7 Overview of the thesis: going beyond ‘legitimizing what is already known’**

Chapter one has introduced the study to its readers by setting out its aims and objectives, the context and significance of the research question and the key epistemological and methodological assumptions that underpin the study.

Chapter two *Theoretical framework: A universe of discourse* establishes the epistemological assumptions and examines the theoretical concepts that the thesis draws on to illuminate the data, focusing on contested understandings of the nature of language and Discourses and the nature of teaching and learning.

Chapter three *Methodology* sets out the methodological assumptions that have shaped the study and makes the connection between the methodological decisions and the epistemological framework that underpins the study. The chapter will give a critical and reflexive account of how the study was constructed. As Griffiths aptly points out (Griffiths, 1998), what happens in research is interconnected, interdependent, complex and overlapping:

The order of the questions in the logical framework should not be confused with when things happen in practice. Logically, the abstractions of epistemology come first, followed by methodology and finally methods and techniques. But this, chronologically and psychologically speaking, is hardly ever descriptive of research as it happens (Griffiths, 1998, p.108).

Griffiths' observation then points to the recursive cycles in data collection and analysis and to the adjustments that those cycles necessitate which chapter three will discuss. Her point will be taken up again in chapter seven.

Chapter four *Gaps in perceptions of 'appropriateness' and language*

*'competence'* and chapter five *'Contribution' – a contested practice in the university* focus on data analysis. Both chapters are framed by Gee's (1996) notion of 'socially contested terms' and Lea and Street's (1997, 2000) model of three perspectives on student writing. Lea and Street's three perspectives will be used as analytic tools that can help uncover and explain patterns in the meanings given by students and lecturers to some of the teaching and learning practices they engage in on Master's courses. The analysis in chapter four focuses on 'competence' (Dubin, 1989) and 'appropriateness' (Fairclough, 1992a) in exposing and discussing gaps in students' and lecturers' perceptions and challenges some of the assumptions that underpin notions of 'good' or 'competent' and 'appropriate' ways of doing, speaking, writing on the course. Chapter five, which is framed by Street's (2000) concept of 'literacy practices', argues that making a 'contribution' in a university classroom is a contested practice and that student contributions need to be taken seriously for students to be enabled to develop and strengthen their 'rhetorical agency'.

The analysis and discussion in chapter six *Student voice in university classrooms - un/available discourses and narratives* will draw on and bring together the concepts of 'subject position' (Peirce, 1989), 'discourse' (Foucault, 1980; Gee, 1996) and 'narrative knowledge' (Hymes, 1996) in order to establish the value of

student contributions and their ‘narrative ways of clarifying meaning’ in learning in higher education institutions. The chapter makes a case for the need to create both research as well as pedagogical spaces that enable students and teachers/lecturers to negotiate and debate their localised knowledges and professional practices.

Chapter seven *Cycles of adjustment – a reflexive look back and ahead* will offer a self-reflexive look back at the research and writing process and discuss the ‘cycles of adjustment’ (Griffiths) that this case study went through. The chapter will address the implications that understanding those cycles as being part of any research process rather than moments of stagnation may have for the teaching of writing as institutionally and epistemologically embedded social practice. It will address the implications for research as well as pedagogic practice that the study’s findings evoke. The limitations of the thesis will also be discussed such as the constraints that *not* interviewing lecturers but only self-selecting MA students imposes on the study’s findings. Further research is thus needed in order to further explore the gaps in lecturers’ and students’ purposes in teaching and learning which should also include case studies of courses or programmes in other disciplinary fields or areas in higher education.

The thesis can make a significant contribution to lecturers’ and students’ understanding of the possibilities and constraints they experience in their teaching and learning encounters, not only with reference to the teaching of academic literacies but also in relation to pedagogy in English language teaching. The thesis proposes a shift away from concepts of ‘appropriateness’ and language



‘competence’ towards concepts of ‘contribution’ and genuine reflexive dialogue in classrooms and academic assignments. The ethnographic-style approach to the case study has opened up innovative avenues that can help create pedagogical spaces that foster such dialogue and can nurture the self-development of students and teachers/lecturers. Finally, a reflexive approach to research and pedagogy, which are after all ways of learning rather than telling, also advances what Foucault called ‘the endeavor to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently rather than legitimating what is already known’.

## CHAPTER 2

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: A UNIVERSE OF DISCOURSE

**One function of theories is to set agendas for research – to generate certain kinds of questions which the research will attempt to answer. Another function is to provide a ‘universe of discourse’ within which the discussion and explanation of research findings can take place.**

**Neil Mercer (1991, p.42)**

#### **1 Re-contextualising context**

This chapter and the next *Methodology – Connecting linguistic and social inquiry* will be concerned with epistemological and methodological questions and assumptions about the nature of knowledge and the nature of language and learning that underpin this study. According to Griffiths (1998),

epistemology encompasses a set of questions and issues about knowledge: what it is, how we get it, how we recognize it, how it relates to truth, how it is entangled with power,

while

methodology is an offshoot of this set of questions. It refers to the theory of getting knowledge, particularly in research contexts. It provides a rationale for the way in which a researcher goes about getting knowledge. [...] It provides reasons for using such techniques, in relation to the kind of knowledge that is being collected, developed or constructed – these different terms fit different theories of knowledge (Griffiths, 1998, p.35).

Before turning to the methodological questions in chapter three, which will provide an insight into how data were ‘collected’ and analysed, this chapter will look at some of the theoretical constructs that underpin the ways in which

teachers/lecturers and learners/students engage in teaching, learning and studying language. In a case study such as this that views *language* as socially constructed and constitutive of social meanings, the *theories of language* also need to be viewed as socially constructed and constitutive of the meanings, values and beliefs about language teaching and learning of participants in the study. It appears that on MA in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) or ELT (English Language Teaching) courses theoretical models of language are employed that account for language not only ‘as-it-is’ but also ‘as-it-is-used’ in various social, educational and cultural contexts. However, there seems to be less awareness among teachers/lecturers, who apply, and students, who aspire to acquire and apply such theoretical knowledge, of the practices that they themselves engage in when teaching and learning (about) language. Language appears to be studied by learners, teachers and researchers alike in units such as words, sentences, texts in ways that reduce the social nature of language and language use to what Pennycook calls ‘*decontextualized* contexts’ (Pennycook, 1994, p.118) with a ‘focus on either text linguistics [...], or spoken discourse structures [... or] the process of conversational negotiation’ (Pennycook, 1994, p.118). The complexity, and messiness at all times, of language-in-use, its embeddedness in social identities, social institutions and relationships of power appear *not* to be the object of analysis and study.

In contrast to these perspectives, in this study assumptions about the nature of language are viewed as contested and language is understood to be historically and socially embedded in discourses and literacy practices. Such a theoretical vantage point makes possible an understanding of the experiences of learners (and

teachers) of language that takes account of the complex and shifting identities and relationships of power that impact on learning (and teaching) encounters and on language as it is learned, used, and studied in various contexts. Context itself, according to Gee (1996, p.77), 'has the nasty habit of almost always seeming clear, transparent, and unproblematic, when it hardly ever actually is'. The significance of context to James (pseudonym), the moderator of the focus group discussion that I conducted for this case study who, at the time, was a Master's student at Central University (for details see chapter three, section seven), becomes clear in the way he opened and framed the discussion for the MA students who had agreed to participate in the focus group. He said:

It's not going to be a kind of me seated here with an agenda, and moving from item to item, maybe questioning, and expecting an answer - question - and answer. But it's sort of around the table talk, [...] let's feel very relaxed, and talk whatever we would like to talk about based on our experiences. [...] I thought perhaps to get going, I might start by asking us to basically think about, we are in a multi-cultural classroom, no doubt about that. One of the things that, when I was reflecting, [...] I asked myself, why did I actually have to come and do my MA in TESOL in a British university. Couldn't it happen better for me to do it in a South African university where I come from, and I started thinking more about that. I thought perhaps to break the ice, [...] for us to look at: how do you feel, [...] perhaps try to think why did you decide to study in a British university rather than perhaps doing it in our own context.

(Focus group discussion, p. 6)

James asks everyone to think about context and about why they had decided to come to a British university for their MA studies. While, on the one hand, he says that he is asking the question 'to break the ice', on the other hand, by asking this



question he immediately puts everything that everyone is going to say in the course of the focus group discussion into the context of studying in a British university. In other words, to James a university is not a 'neutral' place of study but a socially and historically embedded location. This is of particular relevance in a study that aims to understand deeper the relationship between concepts of language and concepts of learning and identity and implications for the ways in which Master's students in the field of applied linguistics conceptualise and experience their own (and their students') language and learning. Pennycook (1994), who has given special attention to notions of 'context' in applied linguistics, in particular with regard to the practice of discourse analysis, argued:

While applied linguistic use of discourse analysis has broadened the options for considering language use, the principal focus has been on the reparation of the structuralist linguistic/semantic split, rather than on an exploration of the wider context of 'contexts', the formation of background knowledge, or why and how a person comes to say certain things (1994, p.119).

James, then, is signalling to the participants in the focus group discussion that it is important to be aware of and explore the wider context of why and how 'a person comes to say certain things'. James thus suggests that, in moderating the focus group discussion, he will not instigate a discussion to hear how they as 'subjects' use language but to share their language and learning experiences based on an understanding that such experiences are always embedded in social, cultural and educational contexts. (See chapter three, section one, for a discussion of the role of research 'subjects'.) James's view appears to be in line with Street (1997) who argues:

In order to build upon the richness and complexity of learners' prior knowledge, we need to treat 'home background' not as a deficit but as affecting deep levels of identity and epistemology, and thereby the stance that learners take with respect to the 'new' literacy practices of the educational setting (Street cited in Stein and Mamabolo, 2005, p.25).

In inviting the students who had come to participate in the focus group discussion to share their context as speakers from a particular language, educational, cultural and professional context, James recognises that the stance that they would take on the issues they had come to raise and discuss would be imbued with the values and assumptions of those contexts. Context, in this wider sense, can usefully be linked to and understood as discourse. Kress (1985) explains:

Discourses are systematically-organised sets of statements which give expression to the meanings and values of an institution. Beyond that, they define, describe and delimit what it is possible to say and not possible to say (and by extension – what it is possible to do or not to do) with respect to the area of concern of that institution, whether marginally or centrally. A discourse provides a set of possible statements about a given area, and organises and gives structure to the manner in which a particular topic, object, process is to be talked about (Kress, 1985, p.7).

Such wider and socially embedded notions of context and discourse then, which draw on Foucault's (1980) conceptions of discourse and power, can help us untangle and understand 'what is possible to say and not possible to say' within certain contexts and fields of study (see also discussion of Gee's notion of Discourse, with a capital 'D', in section two and seven below). James, it seems, was aiming to embed what the participants in the focus group discussion would say in the context, or discourses, of applied linguistics, language, language teaching and language learning as they had encountered and engaged with them on their Master's programmes in multi-cultural classrooms in a British university.



## 2 Literacies and discourses are practices that embody meaning and social relationships

Street (1984) points to the implications of an understanding of the ideological and social nature of language for the pedagogical process. Drawing on Heath's seminal work *Ways with Words* (1983) and her analysis of ways of reading as 'ways of taking' in her article *What no bedtime story means: Narrative skills at home and at school* (1982b), he points out that Heath's analysis

brings out the cultural nature of literacy practices that many would otherwise assume to be 'natural' (Street, 1984, p.122).

Learning and teaching literate practices, Street argues, involve studying and understanding their complex and social nature 'rather than simply understanding the relationship of sounds to letters *as in much contemporary pedagogy* (1984, p.120; my emphasis)'. This case study then draws on theoretical frameworks that take account of this complex and social nature of language and literacy practices. Such frameworks, as will be shown below, provide the conceptual tools that can help us examine some of the teaching and learning practices that Master's students on ELT and TESOL programmes engage in and the way they impact on the approach they take to their own learning (and teaching) as well as prospective outcomes. Street's (1984) observation that

the structures of demands, needs and uses for literacy, and *thereby the definition of it*, vary according to context (1984, p.109; my emphasis)



adds a vital dimension to the discussion of language, literacy and literacy practices in the context of this study as it draws attention to the ‘definition’ of those terms. The dominant assumption, Street observes in *The Implications of the ‘New Literacy Studies’ for Literacy Education* (1997, p.49), ‘has been of a single autonomous literacy that is the same everywhere and simply needs transplanting to new environments’. In contrast to this dominant assumption, Street (1984) argues that literacy is

a social process, in which particular socially constructed technologies are used within particular institutional frameworks for specific social purposes (1984, p.120).

This requires that those who study and teach how to use language and literacy develop an awareness and understanding of the ‘particular institutional frameworks’ and ‘specific social purposes’ that impact on such teaching and learning and on language-in-use. This, in Street’s words, is ‘not so much to “resolve” the debate as to *shift the ground on which we consider issues of language and literacy* in the first place (Street, 1997, p.47; my emphasis)’.

Street (1984) argues that ‘autonomous’ models of language preclude researchers from studying language in its social, cultural and historical embeddedness which ‘ideological’ models of language allow us to explore and analyse. This theoretical premise is at the heart of this study. It is also the basis of academic literacies and discourse approaches to language and learning in higher education. Literacies like discourses carry identities and power relationships which shape actual learning practices and may create barriers that exclude those who are perceived or perceive



themselves to be ‘non-natives’, ‘outsiders’, ‘non-experts’ or ‘novices’ to dominant discourses. In *Introducing Monsieur Foucault* (1990), Ball explains:

Discourse is a central concept in Foucault’s analytical framework. Discourses are about what can be said and thought, but also about who can speak, when, and with what authority. Discourses embody meaning and social relationships, they constitute both subjectivity and power relations (Ball, 1990, p.2).

The notion of discourses, thus, allows us also to study ways of speaking and ways of writing as being embedded in socially and culturally constructed and, therefore, confined conventions and expectations. It is around these conventions and norms that gaps may arise between institutional expectations and expectations of individual students, or groups of students, as described in *The ‘foreshadowed problem’* in chapter one (section two). As Gee (1996, p.190) writes,

apart from Discourses, language and literacy are meaningless. [...] Academicism, in its drive for specialization, too often encourages a narrow focus on bits and pieces of [...] Discourses. This is particularly disastrous when we want to study something like education, where people’s life chances are at stake. Thus, those of us dedicated to the study of language, literacy and education take on a particularly heavy, but important, burden. And yet, what we study, or should study, namely the workings of Discourses, is the foundation within which any other more narrow study relevant to human beings ultimately makes sense.

The concepts of ‘literacies’ and ‘Discourse’, then, can help frame the epistemological and methodological space for this study of students’ perceptions of the academic literacy practices they encounter and engage in on their Master’s programmes. The study draws on an ‘ideological model’ of language and literacy (Street, 1984) which views the theoretical constructs that underpin the study and uses of language and literacies as neither neutral nor ‘given’ but as socially

constructed and hence contested. From such a vantage point, the study can help develop insights into the ways in which particular conceptualisations of language ‘define, describe and delimit’ not just what can and cannot be said but also what can and cannot be explored or ‘learned’ on educational programmes.

### **3 Privileged theoretical frameworks for the study of language**

A social theory of language sees languages embedded in everyday practices in the home, or in the workplace, or in other spaces where living, learning and working take place and language is being used. In this view, language is connected to those who use it while being engaged in those practices; it is connected to their identity and to the social relationships they are part of. Language also carries and conveys relationships of power between those who engage in talk, oral or written, with each other. Therefore, the study of language needs to be broad, flexible, and reflexive. This study then aims to recognise and promote ways of studying and learning that would make it possible for students and lecturers studying and teaching on Master’s programmes to critically and reflexively scrutinise available linguistic theories and the language and literacy practices they engage in. It appears that the MA programmes at the centre of this case study of MA courses in TESOL and ELT, which may be representative of other similar programmes, privileged and made available to students certain theoretical frameworks which aim to explain the way language ‘is’ or ‘works’ or ‘ought to be’ spoken, written, learned and taught, ‘applying’ those to the study of language teaching and language learning. However, the MA students did not have access to other

theoretical frameworks, including those that would have enabled them to reflexively analyse and approach their professional concerns. As Alison put it:

I would have thought that this course would be more along the lines of self-development, you know, to try and improve yourself as a teacher. We come up with various problems from our different situations, workplaces, and really on a course like this you would like your problems to be addressed, and sometimes we come out of the course without really seeing any way in which we can better address the problems that we had when we left our place of work [...] we have just been bombarded with papers, you know, assignments that really don't address themselves to your workplace, problems that you have in your situation.

(Alison, Focus group discussion, p.29)

Alice, it seems, felt that the written assignments confined the MA students to the contexts 'given' through the theoretical frameworks, conventions and expectations set by the assignments. She felt they did not 'address themselves to your workplace' and did not challenge the students to 'try and improve yourself as a teacher'.

While it is not the purpose of this chapter, or this thesis, to critically evaluate linguistic theories, this section briefly addresses the significance of some of the major theorists of language whose names and theoretical frameworks the students encountered on their MA programmes, entering or revisiting the field of applied linguistics. This will enable the reader to understand the impact those theories can have on the ways in which students frame and evaluate their experiences and expectations. The insights gained through the conceptual framework that underpins this case study and the critical and reflexive approach adopted here will



be shown in the analyses in chapter four *Gaps in perceptions of 'appropriateness' and language 'competence'*, chapter five *'Contribution' – a contested practice in the university* and chapter six *Student voice in university classrooms – un/available discourses and narratives*.

Ferdinand de Saussure is one of the most influential theorists of language to date. His most recognised contribution to linguistic knowledge and understanding are his concepts of 'langue' and 'parole'. Linguistic analysis in terms of *langue*, which views individual natural language as a structure or system, and in terms of *parole*, which views individual speech acts of language as a process, makes it possible to view language as always changing and to see individual speakers as being formed by language but also as forming language in the actual act of speaking. However, while Saussure did not necessarily suggest a fixed and essentialist view of language and its structure, his notion of parole did not enough, if at all, acknowledge the degree to which speakers have control over the use of their language in actual speech events. It would appear that his rather 'autonomous' (Street, 1984) view of language underpins many of the approaches to language teaching and learning that the MA students were exposed to on their courses. As John observed:

John: A lot of the learning that I personally have done was quite subtle really [...] but I think it could be better to vary the method, the ways of assessment, and have a little bit more time and space [...] for more interaction, or less sort of conventional and robotic and pressurised form [...]. Well, obviously have assignments, that's fine, but [...] I feel there is only, this emphasis is only on product, and that again entirely goes against,



or contradicts most of the books you read, and most of the sort of theory, you are supposed to pay attention to: the process of learning.

Rachael: That's exactly it.

John: And here the focus is almost entirely on the product.  
(Focus group discussion, p.36)

John here points to the connection that Street (1984) made between theoretical models of literacy and their implications for pedagogy and literacy education, discussed in section one above. John's observation that 'the focus is almost entirely on the product' appears to be in line with Street's (1984, p.49) assertion that the dominant assumption in literacy education has been one of a 'single autonomous literacy' which 'simply needs transplanting to new environments', or 'products' such as assignments that MA students are expected to write. However, while John would like to place emphasis on 'process', it appears that Alison would have liked to go further into the direction of the '*social* process' that Street (1984, p.120; my emphasis) highlights, which would have enabled Alison to critically and reflexively examine the 'particular socially constructed technologies (that) are used within particular institutional frameworks' such as those underpinning her MA assignments and, indeed, her particular workplace.

In the following extract John and Rachael further discuss writing, learning and assessment as they had experienced it at Central University (Rachael) and Riverside University (John) and elaborate on what John had termed the 'conventional and robotic and pressurised form' that he felt writing was expected to take:

John: Well, I said, I said to myself when I was doing my dissertation, I said, I'm going to enjoy this. I just told myself, I'm going to enjoy writing. I'm going to write it the way I want to write it, up to some degree academic style, but I'm going to put in my own thoughts, feelings, quote poets and writers, not just, you know, linguists, and if they don't like it, as long as I pass, I have enjoyed myself, and I have learned something. [...] That was my attitude, so I play the game, but to some degree I also want to do something worthwhile, and not just quote dead ideas that I haven't really made my own at all, so to speak.

Rachael: Hmm, it's because you are expected to say, to quote all these certain people, [...] you've got to know, and yet they talk, in the class they talk about how teachers have been subjected to linguistic theory, you know, we've had to be the consumer of linguistic theory, but all they are doing is making us a consumer of their *applied* linguistic theory basically, we are still a consumer of this product, [...] quoting this, quoting that, so it, [...] it's just across to a different, different sort of consumption really, still us receiving knowledge about teaching, and we've been teaching sometimes for longer than they have in English language classrooms, and yet they are giving us again all this knowledge.

(Focus group discussion, pp.37-38; Rachael's emphasis)

It appears that both John and Rachael express disappointment about what they see as an expectation to 'quote linguists', 'just quote dead ideas', 'quote all these certain people' in their written work. Nevertheless, John felt that writing his dissertation he was still going to 'enjoy writing' and 'put in (his) own thoughts', not just those of linguists as a way of demonstrating that he has 'learned something'. In other words, rather than relying on ideas that he had not 'made (his) own at all', he was going to 'quote poets and writers' to back up his ideas. His way of 'play(ing) the game' while also 'to some degree (doing) something

worthwhile' appears to be a conscious attempt at crossing the line between what is expected of 'novice' writers, namely 'display' knowledge (Geisler, 1994, p.81) and what 'expert' writers do in the academy, namely 'create' and 'transform' knowledge (1994, p.81; see also chapter three, section one). Rachael's observation that while her lecturers in class 'talk about how teachers [like herself = MH] have been subjected to linguistic theory [...] all they are doing is making us a consumer of their *applied* theory' also resonates with Geisler's distinction between what is seen as 'novice' and 'expert' knowledge in the academy. Geisler (1994) argues that, on the one hand, the academy has the

task of producing experts – producing the expert knowledge upon which professionals would act and passing that knowledge on through certified educational programs. On the other hand, (it has) the task of producing the *consumers for expertise* (Geisler, 1994, p.82; my emphasis).

It appears that neither John, who does not want to quote just linguists but also other authoritative voices such as poets and writers, nor Rachael want to be made 'a consumer of this product' that their MA programme offers which she feels is just 'a different sort of consumption [...], still us receiving knowledge about teaching'. Rachael feels that *her expertise* as someone who has 'been teaching sometimes for longer than they have in English language classrooms' does not appear to be valued as 'they [her lecturers = MH] are giving us again all this knowledge'. This point will be discussed further in section five *Social positionings of speakers, learners and language teachers*. This tension between what is perceived to be 'expert' and 'novice' knowledge on the academy, as Geisler (1994) observes, has not been resolved. She writes:



It is only by reserving one language for writing texts about their own work and using another language for reading texts about the work of others that practitioners manage this conflict (Geisler, 1994, p.81).

Geisler, however, does not appear to wish to maintain the status quo. In her concluding chapter (1994), entitled *Reflecting on Academic Literacy*, she calls on practitioners to ‘do something different’ by being reflexive about their own ways of writing, reading and knowing in the academy. She argues:

We cannot claim to construct a full account of literacy practices within the academy without understanding the pressures within our very own reading and writing that tend to shape these accounts and [...] we should ask ourselves why, and – occasionally – do our best to do something different (Geisler, 1994, p.249).

It seems that, rather than being ‘the consumers of expertise’, Alison, John and Rachael would have been keen to ‘have a little bit more time and space for more interaction’ (John, see above) and engage with their lecturers in critical and reflexive discussions of the ‘pressures’ that shape their own and their lecturers’ writing, reading and ‘expert’ ways of knowing.

This is striking because one of Saussure’s most influential linguistic contributions, namely his *Course in General Linguistics* given at the University of Geneva, which was compiled from his students’ lecture notes, ‘could be seen perhaps to be a partial fulfilment of Saussure’s belief that language as such needed to be re-examined if linguistics was to move on to a sounder footing (Lechte, 1994, p.149)’. Saussure was critical of the nineteenth century historical approach to language as he believed that seeing language from a synchronic perspective would give a clearer picture of the actual position of those who speak. Lechte, whose



fields of expertise are social theory, history, semiotics and politics, suggests that with Saussure

the socio-cultural system at a given moment in history, becomes the object of study. This is a system within which the researcher is also inscribed, much as the linguist is inscribed in language. *A greater concern to be more reflexive* thus also becomes the order of the day (Lechte, 1994, p.151; my emphasis).

Saussure's concern appears to be in line with Geisler's call for practitioners to examine 'the pressures within our very own reading and writing that tend to shape these accounts' (1994, p.249), discussed above. However, it would appear from the MA students' accounts (above) that his concern 'to be more reflexive' so that students can recognise that 'the linguist is inscribed in language' was not necessarily apparent from the way the MA courses in this case study were being taught and that this aspect of his thought was not explored or made available to the MA students. As a result, *Saussure's* call for reflexive accounts of (the study of) language-in-use cannot be apparent in their accounts of linguistic theory and 'dead ideas'.

On the other hand, the contributions that the MA students made to this study show them being reflexive about the way in which their MA course programmes as well as their professional and educational backgrounds impacted on their learning (and teaching). Their contributions show them to be not just eager but also highly capable of doing so which suggests that this case study could be a telling case for other courses. It is for this reason that in this thesis I draw on Saussure as facilitating a social and reflexive approach to teaching and learning language-in-use. In taking this broader social view on language and language study, I am not

only acknowledging the need to be reflexive about one's own position not only as researcher or research participant (Lather, 1991; Todorov, 1988; Cameron et al., 1992) but also the need to be reflexive about one's position as a teacher/lecturer or a student. It is a dimension that the thesis helps to contribute to current pedagogical practice and, thereby, hopes to fill this gap. The implications of this methodological position for this case study will be discussed in detail in chapter three; for implications for pedagogy and further research see chapter six and chapter seven.

Another prominent figure in linguistics is Noam Chomsky who, like Saussure and Todorov (see above), features in John Lechte's account of ideas and contributions to contemporary thought. In his book *Fifty Key Contemporary Thinkers*, Lechte, a social theorist and historian, evaluates Chomsky's 'contribution to linguistics, and thence to modern thought (Lechte, 1994, p.49)'. Chomsky contributed with his ideas not only to the study of language but also, with at times controversial ideas, to international and domestic political thought. It seems, however, that on Master's programmes which draw on the field of applied linguistics, Chomsky's work has been mainly recognised for his transformational ('generative') grammar, and more still for the way in which he conceptualises language and language learning in terms of notions of 'competence' and 'performance'. Both theoretical constructs, that of transformational grammar and that of an inherited predisposed connection between *competence* and *performance* in how language is being learned and spoken are based on his assumptions about an 'ideal speaker-hearer': Chomsky's idealised and native speaker-hearer provides the model for *idealised* language use and for the way in which it is to be spoken and transformed. While

his views have been very powerful and still seem to underpin much of linguistic thinking, Barsky (1998) reminds us that as early as 1972 an article in the New York Times quotes George Lakoff, one of Chomsky's colleagues at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, as saying:

Since Chomsky's syntax does not and cannot admit context, he can't even account for the word 'please.'... Nor can he handle hesitations like 'oh' and 'eh.' But it's virtually impossible to talk to Chomsky about these things. He's a genius and he fights dirty when he argues. He uses every trick in the book, and he's the best debater I've ever met (Lakoff quoted in Barsky, 1998, ch.4).

Gumperz (1986, p.9) in his *Introduction to Directions in Sociolinguistics. The Ethnography of Communication* (Gumperz and Hymes, 1986) asserts: 'Chomsky explicitly characterizes linguistics as a branch of cognitive psychology'. In other words, Chomsky never intended his syntax to account for language in practice or for language as being transformed by speakers who cannot be idealised and who may not be native speakers of the language. Instead, according to Aitchison (1989), Chomsky 'was seeking for fundamental principles of language which, if found, would profoundly affect our understanding of how people cope with speech' (1989, p.266). It would appear then that, while Chomsky's contribution to psycholinguistics cannot and should not be ignored, his transformational grammar is 'no help in explaining how a person actually *uses* language' (Aitchison, 1989, p.266, her emphasis). Lechte asserts:

Chomsky resorts to the notion of an innate, specifically human, language capacity as a way of explaining the nature of human language. [...] For the inventor of generative grammar, therefore, language is fundamentally part of human psychology - psychology to be understood as a theory of the faculties of the human mind. *Language competence is thus less linguistic than psychological in origin* (Lechte, 1994, p.52, my emphasis).



Chomsky's notion of competence, which is the competence of an idealised native speaker of the language, is far removed from the experience of *real* speakers, native and non-native, in any real language context. For example, the MA students in this study have found themselves in a situation where they have been subjected to notions of competence and performance and to notions of 'standards' which were not based on their *real* language experience and competence as postgraduate students on an MA programme in Britain, but were, in fact, based on Chomsky's ideal speaker-hearer's competence, a 'yardstick' which they felt was being held against them. As one student put it when I interviewed him for my MA dissertation (Hermerschmidt, 1993),

I'm a type of outgoing person, I always speak my thoughts out [...], but I observed here I had to go back, I couldn't actually come out and be myself during the first few weeks. ... The fact that one was suddenly with native speakers of the language, and one has always felt back in the country that I'm very good in English, and very confident to express my ideas in written work and even orally, but suddenly when one started measuring himself with the native speakers, there was suddenly this feeling of 'who am I', suddenly English came sort of out of me, I felt I'm not speaking my language, I'm not myself. There was that sudden sort of loss of identity, and realising that I've got some miles to walk (student interview, cited in Hermerschmidt, 1993, p.37).

In his second interview he went on to say,

At that stage also not being aware of how you are going to be assessed, and this put a lot of strain on one, trying to speculate and identify on what is expected of me: in terms of content, and in terms of how I express what



I think. Will I be measuring to the standards that are expected as I will be judged on the same yardstick with the native speakers? (student interview, cited in Hermerschmidt, 1993, pp.38-39).

It was very obvious to this student, and to other students whom I interviewed, and to me - an MA student myself at the time - that our language 'performance' was being measured against native speaker's 'competence'. The student raises his concern here about the privileging of the 'native-speaker' model on his MA programme not only because this 'yardstick' caused him stress with regard to 'the standards that (were) expected' but also because when he 'started measuring himself with the native speakers [...] there was that sudden sort of loss of identity'. The student's comment poignantly highlights the link between language and identity and the ways in which students who are non-native speakers of English may feel marginalised and under 'a lot of strain' if such concerns are not being discussed. Native speakers could be affected, too, by this privileging of an *ideal* type of English. As Blanche put it,

I think that the tutors here are very, I mean their backgrounds are very theoretical [...], when they talk about a learner they talk about a learner in an idealized sense, not learners in reality (Blanche, 2nd interview, p.4).

Blanche's observation resonates with Hymes' (1996, p.94) concern that 'programs in linguistics usually are dominated by domains of formal theory'. He writes:

Although a great variety of new activity goes on in a more tolerant general atmosphere in linguistics, nothing has arisen to replace or even challenge the pride of place of so-called theoretical linguistics. It is an irony that ought to be widely recognized that a linguist famous for his contributions to political life has shaped a linguistic climate in which the political has no

place. Chomsky's conception of linguistics is the bringing to perfection of the trend to focus on formal models (Hymes, 1996, p.95).

The reflexive insights that the MA students, quoted above, shared can further strengthen the argument made here that *formal* models of language such as Chomsky's which *idealise* speakers/learners do not take account of the *social* nature of language and literacy practices. It appears that this tension between formal models of 'a learner in an idealized sense' and socially embedded models of 'learners in reality' (Blanche) were not problematised and made the focus of classroom debate or linguistic and social analysis on her MA course in TESOL (Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages) thus reinforcing a Chomskian 'linguistic climate in which the political has no place'. Hymes (1996) argues that

the unintended consequence of the success of this brilliant work was to disable linguists from study of the social and to reinforce assumptions [...] prejudicial to understanding the place of language in it (Hymes, 1996, p.95).

The MA students in this case study were not given 'time and space' (see John above) to critically and reflexively discuss and explore – as part of their studies – the assumptions that underpin formal and social models of language and language learning or issues related to the link between language and identity, questions of 'who am I' and sudden realisations such as 'I've got some miles to walk'. These issues of 'the place of language in (the social)' are crucial when the concern is *not* to explore Chomskian 'avenues to human mind and nature (as) the only general goal worthy of a linguist (Hymes, 1996, p.95)' but, as in this case study, to explore and better understand the link between 'the standards that are expected'

and issues of identity and relations of power in language learning and teaching and the ways in which formal models of idealised speakers/learners impact on students' perceptions of their language 'competence' and their learning and engagement with their course programmes. The analysis in chapter four *Gaps in perceptions of 'appropriateness' and language 'competence'* will take this discussion further.

#### **4        'English' and 'Englishes': implications for language learners and identity**

While the focus of this study is both on non-native *and* native speakers of English and the ways in which their learning or teaching of English can be more fully understood, it is important to respond to some of the issues that abstractions of an ideal 'native speaker' of English raise, which have been addressed by various scholars in the fields of EIL (English as an international language), ELF (English as a lingua franca), EAL (English as an additional language), ESL (English as a second language) and other related fields such as EFL (English as a foreign language). Jenkins (2003) in her book *World Englishes* observes that the distinction between native speakers and non-native speakers can only be usefully employed in the context of modern foreign languages, in general, or EFL, in particular, while in contexts where English is used, or learned, as an international language often no native speakers are present at all (2003, p.81). She quotes an Austrian teacher of English in an Austrian university in the context of her discussion of the notion of 'the native speaker of the standard language':

I don't see why a good EFL teacher, Austrian English teacher, shouldn't have a trace of an accent of his local variety of English. We're talking about international English ... and we're still keeping to this idea that the Austrian teacher ... you must sound more British than the British (Austrian English teacher quoted in Jenkins, 2003, p.82).

The idealised concept of the 'the native speaker' then raise issues of identity rather than issues of 'standard language' for this non-native English teacher as he challenges the notion that you 'must sound more British than the British'. The MA student quoted in section three above also made the link between 'measuring himself with the native speakers' and suddenly feeling that he was not speaking *his* language, when he had been 'confident to express (his) ideas in written work and even orally' back home in South Africa where English is his and his students' second (or third, or fourth) language. Terms such as 'the native speaker' of the 'standard language' then need to be understood to be embedded in relationships of control and ownership over a language and concepts of identity. Widdowson (1994) in his plenary address *The Ownership of English* at the 27th Annual TESOL Convention asserted that

it is a matter of considerable pride and satisfaction for native speakers of English that their language is an international means of communication. But the point is that it is only international to the extent that it is not their language. [...] As soon as you accept that English serves the communicative and communal needs of different communities, it follows logically that it must be diverse (Widdowson, 1994, p.385).

Widdowson's observation then that English, as an international language, 'must be diverse' can help us call into question the 'yardstick' that the MA student, quoted above, felt was used on his course to 'measure' and judge his work against that of 'native speakers' (see also discussion in chapter four, section one).



Widdowson also exposes ‘a contradiction’ (p.387) in what is ‘widely accepted as established wisdom’ (p.386) in language teaching and learning. He explains:

If natural language learning depends on asserting some ownership over the language, this cannot be promoted by means of language which is authentic only because it belongs to somebody else and expresses somebody else’s identity. A pedagogy which combines authenticity of use with autonomy of learning is a contradiction. You cannot have it both ways (Widdowson, 1994, p.387).

In other words, a native speaker’s language is authentic in the sense that it expresses his/her ‘ownership over the language’, which is embedded in his/her sense of identity, cultural values, beliefs, norms and standards. A pedagogy then that privileges ‘somebody else’s identity’ cannot grant learners, who cannot express *their* sense of identity, autonomy of learning. Kramsch (1998) can help us take this point further, suggesting that the ‘native speaker’ is a ‘monolingual, monocultural abstraction’ (Kramsch, 1998, p.80). She argues:

He/she is one who speaks only his/her (standardized) native tongue and lives by one (standardized) national culture. [...] It is not clear whether one is a native speaker by birth, or by education, or by virtue of being recognized and accepted as a member of a like-minded cultural group. If the last seems to be the case, ideal nativeness and claims to a certain ownership of a language must give way to multifarious combinations of language use and membership in various discourse communities (Kramsch, 1998, p.80).

Drawing on her analysis, this case study challenges the notion of the ‘native speaker’. The concept of the native speaker as a ‘monolingual, monocultural abstraction’ is a key concept in this study as it helps us see patterns in the MA students’ experiences and understand and explain the ‘sudden sort of loss of identity’ (see MA student quoted above), loss of confidence and feelings of

anxiety that some of the participant MA students voiced in the interviews and the focus group discussion. This line of argument also resonates with Leibowitz (2004), who concludes her report on how students in South Africa ‘become academically literate’ at school and university, arguing:

Whilst it is understandable that lecturers or teachers make assumptions based on generalisations and commonsense, the study has shown that not all students perform according to categories or labels. Furthermore, treating students according to categories would deprive them of any sense of agency. Educators would need to work both with generalised understandings of student literacy levels, as well as a specific understanding of the individual students in their class. This is clearly more practical in a primary or secondary school than a university, where lecturers would have to build up over time an understanding of what repertoires, skills and habits students bring to bear on their studies (Leibowitz, 2004, p.49).

It appears that the MA students in this case study were not supported in developing such a ‘sense of agency’ that, according to Leibowitz, will help them assert some control over their learning. Kramsch and Leibowitz then enable us to see that notions such as the ‘native speaker’ and ‘standard language’ are not ‘neutral’ conceptualisations but are instead contested and need to be examined in the context of the institutional and epistemological frameworks and assumptions that underpin them (see also analysis and discussion in chapter four and chapter five). The study challenges the ‘monolingual and monocultural abstraction’ of the native speaker and the privileging of abstract and idealised notions of ‘standard language’ in order to help develop theoretical insights into pedagogical practices that take account of the link between language, identity and learning in relation to ‘English’ and can help students develop a ‘sense of agency’ in their learning (see also discussion in chapter five, section six).

## **5 Social positionings of speakers, learners and language teachers**

If ‘educators should begin their planning of courses and course materials from an understanding of the existing cultural capital of their students’ (Leibowitz, 2004, p.49), it seems that educators should also understand the cultural capital that they bring to the classroom encounter with their students. Educators would need to understand that, as Ivanič and Simpson (1992, p.142) argue, ‘written language is “standardised”: that is, it is designed to conceal differences’; they would also need to understand some of those differences that language conceals. As will be argued in chapter four, written and spoken language can impose standards that make students feel that their language might not be ‘appropriate’ or ‘right’ and, as a result, they may feel inadequate or incompetent to say what they want to say in classroom discussions, or in their writing. Weedon (1997) argues that

to gain the full benefit of Saussure’s theory of meaning, we need to view language as system always existing in historically specific discourses. Once language is understood in terms of competing discourses, competing ways of giving meaning to the world, which imply differences in the organization of social power, then language becomes an important site of political struggle (Weedon, 1997, p.23).

The study aims to make a contribution to our understanding of language ‘in terms of competing discourses’ by highlighting that struggles over ‘competing ways of giving meaning to the world’ are being played out not only in unequal face-to-face classroom encounters (Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz, 1982), as discussed in chapter one (section four) but also in encounters in the academic arena that students and lecturers participate in. In exploring her ‘biographical trajectories’, Claire Kramsch (2005, in press) has been able to analyse her struggles over what



it means to teach language in education in the light of Pierre Bourdieu's work and its implications for her understanding of her 'field' of work:

In American academia, I found myself at the bottom of the disciplinary totem pole because I was a language teacher, not a philosopher or a literary scholar. Bourdieu refers to the way French philosophers viewed certain disciplines as 'the inferior caste of linguists, ethnologists and even, especially after 1968, sociologists' [...]. In America, I had become associated with a field that belonged to an inferior caste. My colleagues in philosophy ridiculed the claims that teaching language was more than teaching the mechanics of grammar and vocabulary: 'You say you teach culture? Are you an anthropologist?'. Those in literary studies made fun of my efforts to teach text comprehension: 'Because you still believe that texts have meaning, do you?'. The French philosophers I had loved and admired were read and discussed in the U.S. by scholars in the prestige disciplines (e.g., literary and cultural studies, rhetoric, philosophy), not by my fellow language teachers and the researchers in foreign language education. [...] So I started reading Bourdieu from my new perspective as an American academic and an applied linguist (Kramsch, 2005, in press, ms., p.3).

Kramsch's reflexive account demonstrates that, as a lecturer and language teacher, she had to understand the historical and hierarchical embeddedness of her 'field' in academia and what it was perceived to be teaching students in the university if she wanted to not just understand her position but also 'the needs of (her) American students'. She explains:

Moving to America, I discovered that race and ethnicity took precedence over class, which my students insisted did not exist in America. But I soon realized that, even though the game was played differently, it was still the same old competition for distinction, except that talk about class had, in the U.S., seemingly become taboo. I learned to see myself privileged not by my class, but by my race. [...] But the contemptuous silences and condescending smiles, the compensatory effusions and forced invisibility are all familiar to those on the receiving end of discrimination, whether it be race or class related (Kramsch, 2005, in press, ms., p.3).



Kramsch maps her concern that ‘teaching language was more than teaching the mechanics of grammar and vocabulary’ onto her understanding of the students’ background, the social grammars and social vocabularies they had internalised and, in Leibowitz’ (above) words, the ‘repertoires, skills and habits students bring to bear on their studies’ or, in Bourdieu’s (1992) terms, the students’ ‘cultural’ and ‘linguistic capital’. In the *Editor’s Introduction* to Pierre Bourdieu’s *Language and Symbolic Power*, Thompson (1992) writes that, according to Bourdieu,

linguistic utterances or expressions are always produced in particular contexts or markets, and the properties of these markets endow linguistic products with a certain ‘value’. [...] Hence differences in terms of accent, grammar and vocabulary – the very differences overlooked by formal linguistics – are indices of the social positionings of speakers (Thompson, 1992, p.18).

It appears that the work of Leibowitz (2004) and Kramsch (2005, in press), referred to above, testifies that the ‘social positionings’ of speakers, learners, and teachers, the social situatedness of their repertoires, accents, grammars and vocabularies need to be explored in language teaching and learning rather than measured against the ‘yardstick’ of the standards set by abstract notions of the ‘native speaker’.

It could be argued that one-year Master’s programmes provide a very tight time frame for lecturers to build over time an understanding of the cultural and linguistic capital that students bring to bear on their studies. However, the MA students who contributed to this study give ample testimony to their expectation that their courses would have been more, in Alison’s words, ‘along the lines of

self-development' for you to 'try and improve yourself as a teacher' (Alison, Focus group discussion, p.29). Alison's, John's and Rachael's comments (see section three above) as well as Claire Kramsch's reflexive account (this section) seem to resonate with Ferdinand de Saussure's call for linguists to recognise and to be more reflexive about the ways in which they are inscribed in language. Kramsch (2005) ends her paper with a note from Bourdieu's (2002/2004) autobiographical essay that he wrote a few months before his death:

Nothing would make me happier than to know that I have managed to help some of my readers recognize their experiences, their difficulties, their questions, their sufferings etc. in mine, and that they draw from this realistic identification (that is quite the opposite of an idealistic projection) the means to do and live a tiny bit better what they have been living and doing (Kramsch, 2005, in press, ms., p.13, her translation).

It appears that Bourdieu's hope that colleagues who read and recognise their experiences in his might draw from this 'realistic identification' - which he emphasises is 'quite the opposite of an idealistic projection' - speaks directly to the questions and concerns of professionals such as the MA students in this study. John is not interested in quoting 'dead ideas'; Rachael does not want to be 'the consumer of linguistic theory' and Alison is concerned about her 'self-development' as a teacher. They want to 'do and live a tiny bit better what they have been living and doing' in their MA course work and in their professional work situations. The thesis then hopes to make a contribution not only to language teachers' and educators' 'understanding of the existing cultural capital of their students' (Leibowitz, 2004, p.49) but also their own. (See chapter seven for a reflexive account of the trajectories that I have taken through this study). The thesis draws on the theoretical insights discussed here which can help identify and

explain patterns in the MA students' experiences and aims to provide telling cases that speak to wider theory of the kind developed by Bourdieu, Kramsch and Leibowitz.

## **6 New understandings of language and literacy**

The theoretical insights developed in the field of New Literacy Studies (Street, 1984; 1996, 1997, 2000, 2005; Barton, 1994; Gee, 1996, 1999) underpin the social perspectives on language and literacy that this case study draws on. This field of research and body of literature has grown rapidly over the past decade (Luke, 1996a; Lea and Street, 1997; Ivanič, 1998; Jones, Turner and Street, 1999; Lea and Street, 1999; Lea and Stierer, 2000; Francis et al., 2001; Curry and Lillis, 2004; Leibowitz, 2004). These studies view language, literacy and communicative practices of knowledge construction such as writing and speaking in higher education as embedded in social structures and epistemological contexts. Street has argued in *Literacy in theory and practice* (1984) that 'knowledge is not storage but activity and making sense of it will be very impoverished if this involves looking for only one account of it, the so-called "literal meaning", at the expense of all the other "potential" meanings (1984, p.85)'. However, as Nichols (2003) explains, students in the academy may find this activity of 'making sense' and looking for 'potential' meanings a daunting task. She gives a third-person account of her struggling to develop a critical stance as a (doctoral) student):

The problem was that everything she read sounded so convincing, so skilfully argued. She did not know enough about her topic yet to judge what would be the best perspective to take. [...] She struggled with finding her own perspective on her research topic and was so readily persuaded by



the arguments of experts. [...] She continued to accept what she read until she had developed a map of the theoretical terrain and could begin to navigate herself around it. (Nichols, 2003, pp.135-136).

Nichol's account is telling as she reveals her non-critical acceptance, at first, of what had been so 'skilfully argued' by experts. Her account resonates with Maya's comment:

As a foreign student, I've got to read a lot of books before I go to the lecture, because, you know, sometimes, I don't understand what is going on, so I need to prepare, so reading books [...] gives me a lot of new knowledge, and also opportunity to understand other people talking in the class and also lecturer [...], so writing essays gives me sort of strength to study and the opportunity to know more.  
(Maya, Focus group discussion, p,31)

While Maya prefaces her comment with a note on herself as 'a foreign student', her statement is not at all about her competence, or lack of competence, as a foreign student but rather about her reading for 'new knowledge'. She feels that through reading she can develop her understanding of 'other people talking' in class but also that she can develop her own voice through writing as it gives her the 'strength to study' and the 'opportunity to know more'. Maya's comment and Nichols' account of her beginning to 'navigate' her way through the 'theoretical terrain' also resonate with Cazden's (1989) analysis of the *Contributions of the Bakhtin Circle to 'Communicative Competence'*. She writes:

We acquire words through hearing or reading the utterances of others, and they are thereby marked with the voices of those prior contexts. Words have not only value-free denotations but value-laden connotations (Cazden, 1989, p,121).



Both Maya, as an MA student, and Susan Nichols, as a doctoral student at the time, appear to be working to understand precisely those ‘value-laden connotations’ that the ‘prior contexts’ in which the words they read and write have been used have added to the words they acquire through their studies. ‘Words, as it were, must return to base’, as Lienhardt (quoted in Street, 1984, p.94) states, and students need to return to that base for them to be able to navigate their way through them and the theoretical terrain they help map out. As Cazden writes:

The given forms we inherit include not only grammatical and speech structures but also words – not because we don’t create them anew, but because we don’t learn them from a dictionary (Cazden, 1989, p.121).

This understanding of language is in line with Weedon’s (see section five above) view of ‘language as a system always existing in historically specific discourses’ (Weedon, 1997, p.23). Peirce (1989), in her study of how in the new South Africa teachers and learners of English ‘are attempting to resolve the ambivalent role of English [...] by appropriating the language in the interests of freedom and possibility for all South Africans, asks the question:

What theoretical framework would adequately reflect the powerful role of language, not only as Saussure’s (1959) ‘system of signs that *express* [italics added] ideas’ (p.16), but also as a system that is implicated in constituting the way we perceive ourselves and our society? (Peirce, 1989, p.404).

Drawing on ‘the poststructuralist theory of language as *discourse*’ (Peirce, 1989, p.404, her emphasis) in answering this question, she first clarifies that the term ‘discourse’ as it is used in sociolinguistics to describe ‘units of language larger

than the sentence' is, 'although important and relevant to an understanding of language in use', inadequate 'if we are to understand why language in general, and English in particular, is not neutral'. (Peirce, 1989, p.404). She explains:

In a poststructuralist theory of language, language is not only an abstract structure, but a practice that is socially constructed, produces change, and is changed in human life. [...] The discourses of the classroom, the church, the family and the corporation are implicated in relations of power within which participants take up different subject positions, positions that are constituted by language. Taking up a subject position implies that the subject – the person – is actively engaged in making meaning of his or her life, but is nevertheless constrained by the regulating norms of the discourse in question. When participants cannot find subject positions for themselves within a particular discourse, they may be silenced, or they may attempt to contest or challenge the dominant discourse (Peirce, 1989, p.405).

This study then draws on the New Literacy Studies (Street, 1984; Barton, 1994; Gee, 1996; Street, 1996) and on poststructural theories (Foucault, 1980; Peirce, 1989; Weedon, 1997) which 'provide a "universe of discourse" within which the discussion and explanation of research findings can take place' (Mercer, 1991, p.42).

## **7 Language has meaning only in and through practices**

As has been shown, the 'universe of discourse' or theoretical terrain that has been mapped out here - within which the methodological decisions and research 'findings' will be discussed in the following chapters - is based upon the view that language is socially constructed and constitutive of social meanings and that language is historically and culturally embedded in discourses and literacy practices. Language and meanings are not fixed and cannot, therefore, be defined

in terms of *one* way of speaking or writing. This tends to extend the notion of language to connect with the concept of Discourse with a capital 'D' which is 'always more than just language' (Gee, 1996, p.127; see also chapter one). As a consequence of seeing Discourses as 'ways of being in the world' and as 'ways of believing, valuing and behaving', Gee is concerned with:

a theory and a method for studying how the details of language get recruited, 'on site', to 'pull off' specific social activities and social identities ('memberships' in various social groups, cultures and institutions) (Gee, 1999, p.1).

The students in this study had to 'pull off' their social identity as *student* when they felt they were being assessed as students, and when they felt that their experience prior to being a student was not valued, or even appreciated as their 'background'. On the other hand, the students had to 'pull off', or enact, their identity as a professional teacher, or administrator, or examiner, when their background was to be shared with the other students so they could put views that were put forward, or experiences, into the perspective of their workplace.

However, as the analysis and discussions in chapter four and five will demonstrate, the students felt that their *professional* identities did not get foregrounded enough and were not given the attention that would have been needed to analyse and better understand how, in Gee's (above) words, 'the details of language get recruited', 'on site'. During the focus group discussion, Rachael and Alex expressed their disappointment about the fact that not enough opportunities were being created to know the background of other students on their course:

Rachael: I only knew that you were from a Spanish-speaking country because I heard you speaking Spanish, I didn't know what your background was, teaching background or anything, and I think that I should have known that from within that group.

Alex: Yes.

Rachael: I think that that should have all been part of what we were talking about fundamental concepts of language *teaching*. It would, surely it's relevant to know what *teaching* the other people have been doing.

Alex: Yes, I think one of the basic things in, when you are teaching is getting to know who you are working with, I mean, that's very basic in English language teaching, and here, I think, well, I went to our orientation session, and I kind of knew who were there at the time, but they were not the same as they were in the actual courses [...].

Rachael: And it's relevant, if you say something in that class about, you know, with reference to some aspects of teaching, you say something, then it's important to everybody else to know what background you come from, otherwise it's a bit meaningless to us, you know, she's been teaching big classes, she's been teaching in Mexico, you know, in a university or in a secondary school, and that's her experience, then that's, makes, well, it just makes it have meaning, otherwise it doesn't really help much.

(Rachael and Alex, Focus group discussion, pp.15-16; Rachael's emphasis)

Rachael's and Alex's comments highlight and give urgency to Gee's concern and interest in 'how the details of language get recruited, "on site", to "pull off" specific social activities and social identities'. They, too, are concerned to understand better the details of language use and language teaching and learning



‘on site’ and for this, they feel, it is ‘relevant to know what *teaching* the other people have been doing’ and important to know the background of people: ‘it just makes it have meaning, otherwise it doesn’t really help much’. This demonstrates that as theorists, who are concerned with those processes, students on the ground, ‘on site’, are actually engaged in ‘pulling off’ their identities. The way in which Rachael insists that it is relevant that if you say something in class ‘then it’s important to everybody else to know what background you come from, otherwise it’s a bit meaningless’ is in line with Gee’s (1996) observation who, drawing on Cazden, maintains: ‘We should be clear on the fact that whenever we speak, context is not really something that can be seen and heard, it is actually something people make assumptions about (Gee, 1996, p.75)’ but also with Street’s (1997, 2003) understanding of literacy practices. Street’s model of literacy practices, in his own words, ‘offers a more culturally sensitive view of literacy practices as they vary from one context to another (Street, 2003, p.1)’. In other words, if someone has been teaching ‘big classes’, ‘in Mexico’, ‘in a university or in a secondary school’, then these experiences shape the concepts and meanings that will be brought to literacy practices such as seminar or group discussions. As Alex points out, following on from Rachael’s comment above,

Alex: That’s true, because all you have is your experience to share, you’re not going to lecture anyone, so it would be very helpful if, you know, which experience are you sharing from.

(Focus group discussion, p.16)

The point that Alex, and Rachael, are making is that knowing ‘which experience (we) are sharing from’ gives the other students the background to the teaching

contexts they have been part of. The students' concern then is in line with Street's argument that the concept of literacy practices 'enables us to specify the particularity of cultural practices' (Street, 1997, p.50) or, in the context of this study, the particularity of the teaching practices that have shaped the 'concepts and meanings brought' to class discussions, seminars and lectures.

In this case study, then, language is not neutral and meanings are not 'given'. Meanings may overlap and compete as language use carries the meanings and identities of those who speak, or write. Language is charged with the meanings of the places speakers and writers have lived in, the meanings of the disciplines or institutions they have worked in, and the meanings of their interactions with these places and fields. As Bakhtin (1981) in *The Dialogic Imagination* observes,

language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions; it is populated – overpopulated – with the intentions of others. Expropriating it, forcing it to submit to one's own intentions and accents, is a difficult and complicated process (Bakhtin, 1981, p.294).

This case study, drawing on Bakhtin, is concerned with the MA students' experiences and, in Bourdieu's terms, 'their difficulties, their questions, their sufferings', as they struggle to 'expropriate' the language of their academic and professional fields. Language then has to be understood as constituting as well as reflecting meanings and has to be studied 'on site', where the MA students construct identities and relationships of power and where these are being constructed for them through the teaching and learning practices they engage in. Discourse, then, has to be viewed as being socially constitutive and reproductive of social practices, knowledge, social identities and social relationships as well as

being shaped by participants within social practices and events (Foucault, 1980; Peirce, 1989; Fairclough, 1992c; Gee 1996; Weedon 1997). Power relations are viewed as being embedded in discourse (Foucault 1980). Furthermore, discourses are understood as always being connected to other discourses (Bakhtin 1981).

According to Gee, however, you cannot challenge a discourse from within.

‘Discourses are by definition limited perspectives (Gee 1996:13)’. Therefore, what a formal linguist might assume to be acceptable and worth researching will differ from what might be seen as possible from a broader social perspective. (See also chapter six *Student voice in university classrooms - Un/available discourses and narratives* and chapter seven *Cycles of adjustment – a reflexive look back and ahead*). Assumptions of what is un/acceptable translate into what is being researched and how it is being researched, but also into whether a piece of research is being valued. In *Researching Language* (Cameron et al., 1992), Cameron asserts that

a piece of work is research if it gets a Ph.D., gets published in academic journals, is part of a body of knowledge judged to be authoritative, is valued by accredited academics. There is room for scepticism about the value of some of the work that historically has satisfied these criteria (Cameron et al., 1992, p.137).

Her observation appears to be in line with Gee’s (1999) assertion that ‘*language has meaning only in and through practices* (1999, p.8, his emphasis)’. In this study, then, practices are being viewed as the institutional and cultural forms of social activities which invoke discourses, identities and social relationships for those engaging in them. Gee explains:

When we speak or write we always take a particular *perspective* on what the ‘world’ is like. This involves us in taking perspectives on what is ‘normal’ and not; what is ‘acceptable’ and not; what is ‘right’ and not; what is ‘real’ and not; what is the ‘way things are’ and not; what is the ‘ways things ought to be’ and not; what is ‘possible’ and not; what ‘people like us’ or ‘people like them’ do and don’t do; and so on and so forth (Gee, 1999, p.2, his emphasis).

In other words, the practices learners and teachers engage in may compel them to comply with norms, expectations and the ‘ways things ought to be’ which they might challenge when they are speaking or writing from another institutional or epistemological *perspective*. It is these pressures that I investigate in this study, as they are embedded in the teaching and learning and practices MA students engage in as students and professionals. Based on the epistemological framework established here, chapter three will now turn to a detailed discussion of the rationale for the way in which this case study was conducted.



## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

**If, as Clifford Geertz (1988) puts it, one of our tasks is ‘to convince our readers that we have actually penetrated (or been penetrated by) another form of life, of having, one way or another truly “been there”’ (pp.4-5), it is also important that we give our readers a sense of having ‘been there’ too.**

**Ely, Vinz, Downing and Anzul,  
1997, p.184**

#### **1      Constructing the study**

The previous chapter established the theoretical ground on which the methodological framework and the decisions that lead to data collection and analysis can be discussed here. A case was made for a view of language as contested and as historically and socially embedded in Discourses (Foucault, 1980; Gee, 1996) and literacy practices (Street, 2000). Such an understanding calls for speakers, learners and teachers to be reflexive about the way in which language use invokes social identities and, often unequal, relationships of power. As discussed in chapter two (section one), methodology ‘provides a rationale for the way in which a researcher goes about getting knowledge [...] and reasons for using such techniques’ (Griffiths, 1998, p.35) in relation to the epistemological framework that underpins the research. Thus, the methodological account of data collection and data analysis presented in this chapter will have to take account of the complex issues raised by a conceptual framework that views language as social practice.

This section examines how these theoretical perspectives have impacted on the way in which methodological decisions have been made in this case study. The section also explores issues of who has authority over knowledge in a research context. Researchers working within qualitative/interpretivist research frame (Guba and Lincoln, 1985; Cameron et al, 1992) maintain that views of what constitutes reality and what is the ‘right’ way of going about researching and constructing and interpreting reality are contested. Research questions then and research writing reflect the researcher’s beliefs about the social world. As Cameron et al point out,

researchers cannot help being socially located persons. We inevitably bring our biographies and our subjectivities to every stage of the research process, and this influences the questions we ask and the ways in which we try to find answers (Cameron et al, 1992, p.5).

In other words, the assumptions researchers make about the nature of knowledge and the nature of research are at the heart of their decisions on how they explore or explain reality or ‘discover’ the truth. Cameron et al also observe that

research *subjects* themselves are active and reflexive beings who have insights into their situations and experiences (1992, p.5; my emphasis).

However, Cameron et al’s term research ‘subjects’ could be seen to undermine their own argument of research subjects being ‘active and reflexive beings’. In this case study then, I will refer to the MA students who took part in the research process as *participants*, or *participant* students, precisely because it builds on their ‘insights into their situations and experience’. This study hopes to contribute valuable insights to methodological debates about ‘reflexivity’ in research (Lather,

1991; Usher, 1997), with a particular focus on how research students like myself who write within, or across, academic disciplines construct and write their way into academic *fields and identities* and how ways of doing and writing research might be conceptualised and ‘taught’ (see chapter seven *Cycles of adjustment – a reflexive look back and ahead*).

Lather’s (1991) view of reflexivity as ‘attending to the assumptions that undergird a particular act of social inquiry (1991, p.21; see also chapter one)’ can usefully be applied to this chapter which offers an account of the inquiry practices employed in this study and the assumptions that I brought to these particular acts of data collection and data analysis. According to Hammersley and Atkinson (1995),

Reflexivity [...] implies that the orientations of researchers will be shaped by their socio-historical locations, including the values and interests that these locations confer upon them. What this represents is a rejection of the idea that social research is, or can be, carried out in some autonomous realm that is insulated from the wider society and from the particular biography of the researcher, in such a way that its findings can be unaffected by social processes and personal characteristics (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983, p.16).

This view of reflexivity appears to resonate with Cameron et al’s assertion that researchers are ‘socially located persons’ and ‘this influences the questions we ask and the ways in which we try to find answers’. Researchers thus bring to their research their own assumptions and those held in their academic fields which demarcate their ways of questioning and thinking as they construct the Discourses that underpin their research (see chapter two). As discussed in chapter two,

according to Gee (1996), discourses need to be understood as ways of believing, behaving, and valuing, they represent different ways of understanding. Gee says:

Most of what a Discourse does with us and most of what we do with a Discourse is unconscious, unreflective, and uncritical. Each Discourse protects itself by demanding from its adherents performances which act as though its ways of being, thinking, acting, talking, writing, reading and valuing are right, natural, obvious, the way good and intelligent and normal people behave. In this regard, all Discourses are false - none of them is, in fact, the first or last word on truth (Gee, 1996, p.190).

Writing research we interact with Discourses in Gee's sense, which for their own protection demand uncritical adjustment to their ways of thinking and acting rather than critical and self-reflexive awareness of what 'a Discourse does with us'. Research accounts then need to be reflexive and explicit about the epistemological and methodological concepts that have been constitutive of the research process and, crucially, the research 'findings'. (For a reflexive account of the way in which the theoretical orientations in this study have been shaped and reshaped see also chapter seven).

Ballard and Clanchy (1988) view the process of entering academic discourses as being one of transition and adjustment. They explain:

few seem to recognize the problem for what it is - an unsteady transition between cultures - or remember from their own experience the initial difficulties of adjustment, the problem of trying to fathom what constitutes acceptable behaviour in a new cultural context where the 'deep' rules are rarely made explicit (1988, p.13).



However, Ballard and Clanchy (1988) go beyond this to say that viewing writing as learning how to use the 'correct' code conceals the complex issues involved in the organisation of knowledge in writing:

Our argument, so far, has been that learning within the university is a process of gradual socialization into a distinctive culture of knowledge, and that 'literacy' must be seen in terms of the functions to which language is put in that culture. Yet even that formulation is a gross oversimplification, implying as it does that the culture is somehow uniform or static and that knowledge comes to the learner in a pure, undifferentiated form. This, of course, is not the case. Knowledge, like nature, is revealed not in itself but through our methods of questioning (Ballard and Clanchy 1988, p.14).

If our methods and ways of questioning reveal knowledge then so do our ways of writing knowledge. Research students thus find themselves walking (writing) a fine line between 'the creation and transformation of academic knowledge', which Geisler (1994, p.81) identifies as the literacy practices of experts, and 'the getting and displaying of that knowledge', characterized by Geisler as the literacy practices of novices. As research students, we need to come to terms with our role as writers, as authors, and take account of the authority that we have over the knowledge we construct. Power, according to Foucault (1980),

is never localised here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organisation. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power (1980, p.98).

In other words, we need to be analytically aware of our involvement in power relations in our research practices. While research and writing are situated within institutional, disciplinary, social and cultural constraints, researchers need to be

reflexively aware of the ways in which literacy practices *open up and close down* avenues that can or cannot be explored and *open and close* gates for both ‘experts’ and ‘novices’ in the academy.

The metaphor of language as gatekeeper can further this discussion. It was introduced by conversational analysts such as Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz (1982) who observed that

in committee meetings and to some extent in debates and discussions, tacitly understood rules of preference, unspoken conventions as to what counts as valid and what information may or may not be introduced prevail. The participant structure of such events thus reflects a real power asymmetry underneath the surface equality, a serious problem when the lesser communicator does not know the rules. The issue is compounded by the fact that what is evaluated appears to be neutral (1982, p.9).

Drawing on such analyses of language in institutions, Collins (1992, p.3) observes:

someone is judging, and someone is being judged.

It can be argued then that those who judge and those who are being judged do not necessarily share their expectations and evaluations of institutional contexts and conventions and, as a result, interpretations of what is meant or intended may conflict. Moreover, if these conventions and expectations are not shared, familiar strategies for judgements may no longer be successful, and what counts as ‘good’ may come into question. Collins (1992) argues that it

is not just that understandings of context are not shared, and therefore readings of meaning and intention conflict, but rather that evaluation is always culture-bound and based on unequal power (1992, p.3).

Foucault's assertion, then, that individuals are 'always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising power' may open up ways for a more complex analysis of power relations in 'equal' and unequal encounters. While individual academics and research students do seem to be judged within institutional and disciplinary constraints, they are also in a position to be critical of the discourses of their fields and decide which avenues they want to explore in their academic work. This chapter then offers an account of the 'methods of questioning' (Ballard and Clanchy) in this case study and the fine line that I have been walking (and writing) between 'the getting and displaying of [...] knowledge' and 'the creation and transformation of academic knowledge' (Geisler), as discussed above.

## **2 Taking an ethnographic perspective**

Rowland's observation: 'If, as it appears, there is a tension between university teachers' and their students' perceptions about each other's purposes, then we need to know about it' (Rowland, 2002, p.55) is repeated here to remind the reader of the purpose of this study. As discussed in chapter one (section one), the thesis hopes to make a contribution to lecturers' and students' understanding of the way in which at times their experiences and expectations of their encounters appear to be at cross-purposes. MA students engage with established 'expert' knowledge on their courses but they also need to establish their academic and professional self in response to that knowledge. Based on the assumption that on

their courses MA students are exposed to ways of knowing and ways of doing that are not necessarily the ways of knowing and doing that they would have expected on the basis of *their* ‘expert’ knowledge, in this study I am ‘privileging’ the students’ professional insights and ‘novice’ knowledge and their perceptions of the learning and teaching practices they encountered in their MA classrooms. However, saying that I set out to ‘privilege’ the students’ knowledge, I do not mean to imply that the views and perspectives of lecturers do not count. (In chapter seven, section four, the limitations of this study and the need for further research that draws on students’ as well as lecturers’ insights will be discussed.) What students know is different from what their teachers know and individual students’ observations and perceptions of what went on in classroom discussions are different from other students’ observations and perceptions. It is these different student perspectives that the study builds on and takes as its points of departure. According to Evans (1988),

when the aim is to describe and understand a complex, shifting reality in some depth, when one is working with the sheer messiness of human reality, it has to be recognized that the apparently ‘unrepresentative’ individual is expressing something vital and that what is certain and verifiable is likely to be superficial and simplistic (Evans 1988, p.5).

The aim of data collection and analysis then is not to find a simple and verifiable truth but to explore the teaching and learning practices that the MA students engaged in both as students on their MA courses but also as teachers in order to ‘unpack’ and better understand some of the theoretical models that underpin those activities and practices, recognising that the ‘apparently “unrepresentative” individual is expressing something vital’. This case study is best characterised as



an ethnographic-style study which adopts an ‘ethnographic perspective’, drawing on Green and Bloome (1997), who explain:

By adopting an *ethnographic perspective*, we mean that it is possible to take a more focused approach (i.e. do less than a comprehensive ethnography) to study particular aspects of everyday life and cultural practices of a social group. Central to an ethnographic perspective is the use of theories of culture and inquiry practices derived from anthropology or sociology to guide the research (Green and Bloome, 1997, p.183; their emphasis).

This study, which builds on the epistemological assumption that knowledge is constructed rather than ‘out there’ to be discovered and that no Discourse is ‘the first or the last word on truth’ (Gee, 1996; see also discussion in chapter two), is in line with this methodological stance as it resists, although it cannot entirely avoid, preconceived ideas about what will be ‘discovered’. Adopting Green and Bloome’s perspective, this study then does not search for a ‘typical’ case but can be characterised as searching for a ‘telling’ case. According to Mitchell (1984),

a good case study [...] enables the analyst to establish theoretically valid connections between events and phenomena which previously were ineluctable. From this point of view, the search for a ‘typical’ case for analytical exposition is likely to be less fruitful than the search for a ‘telling’ case in which the particular circumstances surrounding a case serve to make previously obscure theoretical relationships suddenly apparent (Mitchell 1984, p.239).

This case study then aims to establish a ‘telling case’, searching for patterns in the ways in which the participant MA students make sense of the learning and teaching practices they encounter on their course but also to offer explanations using the theoretical constructs that underpin this study or, in Mitchell’s terms, ‘to make previously obscure theoretical relationships [...] apparent’. The study then

is informed by and seeks to inform theory. The research design and focus have emerged 'from the field', starting from classroom observation and in-depth interviews in the broadest sense. The focus of data collection was narrowed and deepened, as initial data analysis began to feed back into data collection through further in-depth interviews and a focus group discussion, as will be discussed in this chapter.

In this research I have taken an emic, or insider's, perspective; I have done research from within the group I studied. Being an insider to the experience of going through an MA course, I could re-immense myself into that experience. However, what was familiar about being an MA student was, at the same time, unfamiliar because I was no longer an MA student. I could not take for granted that I knew what was going on, I was an outsider who could no longer be sure that she knew the culture of the group, or the institution. Moreover, as a research student, my identity kept shifting from being an insider to being an outsider (see also chapter one, section two), which has enabled me to distance myself from being an MA student and to use my own experience as a research tool. Arguably, claims to 'see' or 'understand' what we see as going on in a research setting can only be made when we – at the same time – acknowledge the limitations of our perspectives and frameworks. However, Gee's (1996, p.190) observation, discussed above, would suggest that neither insiders nor outsiders can be consciously aware of 'what a Discourse does with us and [...] what we do with a Discourse' as we continue to perpetuate its ways of doing and valuing. Hammersley's (1992) observation can add a vital point to this discussion,

particularly in the context of studies that take an emic perspective such as this. He writes:

When a setting is familiar the danger of misunderstanding is especially great just because we are inclined to believe that we understand what is going on when we may not (1992, p.19).

Hammersley's concern then is that researchers might misunderstand precisely because they work 'from within' as they might take for granted that they 'know' and understand when they might not, a concern also shared by Sara Delamont (see chapter one, section six). Her concern, quoting Becker, was that observers in settings familiar to them might see 'only the things that are *conventionally* "there" to be seen' (my emphasis).

Todorov (1988) argument in his essay about knowledge construction in anthropology is helpful here. He makes an argument for being inside *and* outside; an argument for reflexivity as a process of moving in *and* out as a conscious effort to understand better:

The climax of [...] anthropological education is thus not distancing (in relation to others) but detachment (in relation to oneself). The frequenting of other people and great familiarity with their customs are a good way to get there; but once this point has been reached (though of course it is a movement that always has to be resumed from the beginning), it is less important to know whether the view will fall on others – in which case distance is a given which one will try to reduce – or on one's own people [...]. Therein is the apparent paradox – responsible for the contradictory formulae of Lévi-Strauss: externality is only an advantage if one is at the same time perfectly inside (Todorov, 1988, p.4).

According to Todorov's (and Lévi-Strauss's) observation, then, acquiring familiarity with other people and with oneself is a journey between proximity and



distance, constantly going back and forth, critically and reflexively examining other people, groups, and oneself within *and* outside it. Not only does this journey towards other people reduce distance from them, it also increases detachment from our own people and our own ways, and brings us closer to a new understanding of ourselves. Understanding, then, can be furthered if we get to see what insiders see and move out to detach ourselves and take an analytical and self-reflexive stance on what we have ‘seen’, only to move back in to ‘see’ again from the inside. (See also section twelve below.)

As Street (2000) observes, literacy practices (see also chapter two and chapter five, section two) cannot be understood ‘simply by sitting on the wall with a video and watching what is happening’ (2000, p.21). He writes:

There is an ethnographic issue here: we have to start talking to people, listening to them and linking their immediate experience of reading and writing out to other things that they do as well (Street, 2000, p.21).

In this case study then I would not be ‘sitting on the wall’ of MA classrooms, watching what is happening, but instead use my insider *and* outsider understanding as a research tool. In Todorov’s (1988) terms, I began this research on the inside but moved in and out of the group of MA students and MA classrooms in order to achieve ‘not distancing’ but ‘detachment’ while being ‘at the same time perfectly inside’.

From my own experience of being a former MA student, I knew that the silent students in class got constructed as not knowing and as having a language deficit and I had noticed that the students who did the talking did not necessarily get



treated as making valuable contributions to the class. I also knew that when *I* was silent in class I *did* feel ‘inadequate’ at times, both with regard to ‘language’ and with regard to ‘knowledge’. But I also knew that I did not necessarily not speak because I did not know. I did not speak because I did not feel involved in what was going on, I did not speak because I was not so sure about how to get into an ongoing debate or, more importantly, how to get out of it. I intuitively felt that I did not know how to join the debate *not because* I did not have points to make or issues to raise *but because* I did not seem to know the underlying assumptions and expectations of classroom ‘interaction’. What puzzled me more was that I had been in classrooms before, as a teacher and as a learner, and that I thought I knew ‘the game’ and that I could make a decision as to whether I wanted to participate, or not. On the MA course, however, I (like other students) did *not* know the game.

### 3 ‘Access’

From this insider perspective then I had begun to be interested in going beneath the surface of classroom interaction, in finding out what the driving force was for students to enter an MA programme, and to actively participate in classroom discussions, or not to participate. This interest led me to undertake this case study (see also chapter one, section two) as I continued to be interested in what could be seen as going on in MA classrooms, and in what could not be seen, namely the expectations of students and lecturers of each other and the underlying beliefs about classroom interaction that students and lecturers bring to their encounter in the classroom. After negotiating access, having myself finished the MA course, I began to be inside MA classes and groups of MA students again. In other words, I

was moving in *and* out, being ‘perfectly inside’ *and* ‘detaching’ myself, linking classroom practices and ‘something broader of a cultural and social kind’ (Street, 2000, p.21). Being inside *and* detached, in Todorov’s terms, also helps mitigate against researchers (like myself) who take an emic perspective taking for granted that they understand what they observe. This point will be further discussed in section four below.

Maybin (1996) observed in her study of informal language practices among ten to eleven year old school pupils that

absorption into the social activities of a group is in some contexts arguably less disruptive than being a constantly present observer, and the rapport and trust I built up with children over my three week period in the classroom contributed considerably to the success of the interviews later (1996, p.114).

She was able to immerse herself into the ongoing classroom activities, helping the children with their work, thus meeting their ‘expectations that adults were there to help them, and because of the boredom of sitting for lengthy periods observing from the side of the classroom’ (Maybin 1996, p.113). In other words, doing with the MA students and thus meeting their expectations of what participating in an MA classroom means rather than observing what they do is what has helped create the shared experience that I could draw on in this case study.

I went to lectures, taking different kinds of field notes. I took what I came to call ‘annotated lecture notes’ during my participant classroom observations. These were *learning notes*, notes of the kind that students take to do with the content of the lecture, but I ‘annotated’ them with *research notes* such as observations or

comments to do with this case study, for instance comments about my role as a participant observer (see Appendix 3.1). Taking field notes as ‘annotated lecture notes’ I felt was less intrusive than sitting at the back of the class with an observer’s notepad. I took notes ‘in the field’, for example on informal conversations with students, but also ‘headnotes’ (Ottenberg, 1990). Ottenberg explains that they are

the notes in my mind, the memories of my field research. I call them my headnotes. As I collected my written notes, there were many more impressions, scenes, experiences than I wrote down or could possibly have recorded. Indeed, I did not keep a diary and only occasionally incorporated diary-type material into my fieldnotes, a fact that I very much regret today (1990, p.144).

Ottenberg’s critical and self-reflexive comments resonate with my own experience of taking field notes. There were, similar to Ottenberg’s observation, ‘impressions, scenes, experiences’ that I felt were impossible to record. At the time of data collection and participant observation, I was preoccupied with the interview data, transcribing, initial data analysis, second interviews and the focus group discussion and, regrettably, missed the opportunity to suggest to the participant MA students that they could take their own notes on classroom activities. The students’ field notes, too, could have taken the form of unobtrusive annotated lecture notes as described above, adding research notes to their learning notes. It is a limitation of this study that this dimension to data collection and analysis is now lacking. However, as further discussions of data collection in this chapter will show, the interviews have yielded a mountain of data despite this limitation, testifying to the students’ deep insight into the teaching and learning

practices they encountered and engaged in, based on their participation in and observation of classrooms.

As discussed in section two above, in this case study I was not ‘sitting on the wall with a video watching’ what went on in MA classes and lectures. On the contrary, I actively participated in what was going on because, while I was observing classroom interaction and participation, I also wanted to give the students the opportunity to observe *me*. ‘Access’ does not happen when researchers get access to research sites. It seems to me that access is a process of getting in contact with the research participants and the social practices they engage in but also a process in which *they* ‘access’ the research they are taking part in. The students who participated in this case study were able to access the educational and the research discourses I was operating in and so, while not having the choice of not coming to the MA classes that I came to observe, they were able to decide whether or not they wanted to be interviewed and take part in the focus group discussion. I would argue that it was as important for me as it was for the MA students that we were able to ‘access’ each others’ Discourses. The following interview extract shows that the things I ‘said in class’ influenced Blanche’s decision to participate in this study:

MH: How would you describe your role in this research process that you got involved in, and how have you seen my coming to classes, and ‘hanging around’, doing the interviews?

Blanche: Well, at first I wasn’t sure I trusted you, and I think you kind of had to win my trust, and I think you won my trust, I mean I do trust you now, because I wasn’t really sure what you were doing at first, I mean you



were kind of coming to classes, and I mean I did see you as an outsider kind of, because you weren't in the MA TESOL program, and you know, I felt, I mean, especially the particular class you were coming to, the Fundamentals class, that was kind of a close knit group, because a lot of us were taking the exam, and you coming in, at first I wasn't sure about you, you know, I mean the group sort of had an identity, and I just didn't really know, you know. But things you said in class showed that you, I thought, you had a lot of good insights, and so you won me over, so to speak (Blanche, 2nd interview, p13).

The points of departure in this case study were *my* questions, based on *my* observations and insights. I constructed this study; I took the decisions as to how to approach the research question. However, as this study evolved, the interaction between the research design, my initial questions, the participant MA students' interview responses, my initial analyses and what was going on 'in the field' have also shaped and driven this study. Here is how Alison put what she had perceived to be 'a problem' when I asked her:

MH: Towards the end of your last interview you were saying 'the fact that there is somebody who appreciates that there is a problem I think that is a starting point'. Now, what is the problem?

Alison: The problem is that there is a problem as far as working together in a course like this is concerned, and that is what I was talking about when I talked about a problem, and once people get to appreciate that I think everybody is trying to turn a blind eye to it, people do notice that there is a problem, they notice that people are not working together on assignments, they notice that other people are selfish, they hide books from other people until an assignment has been handed in, they notice that people stick together depending on where they come from. [...] So I do appreciate the fact that, at least according to my perception, somebody

appreciates this fact that there is a problem, and that is why probably I agreed to being interviewed, because, as I was saying earlier, it gives you a platform where one can talk about such a problem, even if it's not resolved. I mean solved immediately, but at least you know that there is somebody who is listening, and listening helps to some extent. Something which I hadn't been offered on this course.

(Alison, 2nd interview, p16)

When I started data collection I was committed to the idea of listening to the students' contributions and to making their voice heard and count. However, I do not perceive this research to be 'empowering': power is not there to be simply given or taken (see also discussion of Foucault's notion of power in chapter four, section six). This study does speak, though, to issues of self-development and agency in professional and academic contexts (see discussion in chapter six).

In the first lines of his autobiography *Participant Observer*, William Foote Whyte (1994), writes:

'Participant observer' not only conveys the research style for which I am best known, but in a sense, it also describes who I am and have been: an active participant [...], yet an observer (1994, p.3).

He describes the channels through which he gained access to the North End, the community he studied in *Street Corner Society* (Whyte, 1943), and how, initially, he was struggling to give his study direction. He writes:

I had the general idea that I was conducting a community study as a nonparticipating observer, but as I became accepted into the community, I found myself becoming almost a nonobserving participant. I got the feel of local life, but that meant that I took for granted what my friends took for granted. I was immersed in their life, but I could as yet make little sense of

it. I had the feeling I was doing something important, but I had yet to explain to myself what it was (Whyte, 1994, p.96).

The key research interest, the ‘general idea’, in this case study was to explore how the expectations that are set up in MA programmes in ELT or TESOL in Britain impact on the cultural processes and the educational and professional experience that MA students bring to their courses. The general questions that I had on my mind when I began data collection were questions such as:

What do students expect from their courses?

What do they think they have to know in order to be successful in their course/work?

How did they think they were going to learn what was expected of them?

What do they think they can bring to their courses?

How do students perceive themselves, their language and the language of others?

What have they come to learn/to take away/to give?

It was to be a long journey before I was able to give meaning and interpret what the students shared in the research interviews and the focus group discussion in a way that would illuminate their perceptions of ‘what was going on’ in the learning (and teaching) practices they encountered on their MA courses. (For a discussion of that journey see also chapter seven.) As Gee asserts: ‘No meaning is fixed, meaning is always in flux’ (Gee, 1996, p.79). Not only is meaning always in flux, meaning is also contested. In order to make visible then and help understand some of the meanings that postgraduate students bring to the academic practices they

take part in during their studies, data analysis would need to focus on the ways in which the participant MA students construct and understand the social reality of being a student but also a professional, on exploring the identity educational institutions construct for them but also on how students construct an identity, or identities, for themselves. As Geisler (1994) observes,

experts are not the only ones who can make connections between specialized content and experience. They are simply the only ones whose experience counts (Geisler 1994, p.93).

It is precisely this tension between what counts as ‘expert’ knowledge and knowledge that does not carry the same professional weight and the contestation over who has authority over processes of meaning making and knowledge construction that this study seeks to explore.

#### 4 Data collection

This case study adopts an *ethnographic perspective* as advocated by Green and Bloome (1997) and discussed in section two above. They maintain that

unlike psychological studies of learning and knowledge that begin with a priori definitions of knowledge and learning, the key question that ethnographers in education ask is: what counts as knowledge and learning in classrooms to teachers and students? [...] From this perspective, knowledge and learning do not exist separate from the cultural and social constructions of members of the classroom (Greene and Bloome, 1997, p.191).

From such a perspective then data are not ‘collected’ but *constructed* and data collection and data analysis are viewed as processes of *knowledge construction*.



Using language as a reflexive tool, the research interviews and focus group discussion will be analysed as discursive practices, in which shifting identities of researcher and researched have their impact on shifting power relations in the interview process. Meanings are not fixed (see Gee above), or static, they are interpretations of what is perceived to be going on in social practices such as teaching and learning and doing research by those participating in those practices. Meanings are negotiated, and re-negotiated, in the actual practices as they evolve and in the interactions and social relationships between participants. In other words, meanings of social events and practices are not 'out there' to be discovered, meanings are highly contested and constructed in relation to the socio-cultural knowledge available to individual participants or to groups of participants who may share some of this knowledge. The issue is not to demonstrate that the students are 'right', or that I am 'right' in my interpretations and my analysis. Like Fairclough and Wodak (1997) I believe that

interpretations and explanations are never finished and authoritative; they are dynamic and open, open to new contexts and new information (1997, p.279).

Rather than 'finding' an authoritative 'truth' the aim here is to illustrate the social and cultural embeddedness of the meanings that the participant MA students have constructed for the literacy practices they have engaged in on their courses (see also chapter two, section two). This epistemological understanding and the methodological perspectives this study draws on map on to each other as the study seeks to establish a 'telling case' (see Mitchell above). Here, the analytical tools and 'inquiry practices' have been employed to search for patterns and explanations for the constructions that emerge in the data. Ultimately, they add up

to a wider picture than any one of them alone could provide and can deepen our theoretical understanding of the issues the study seeks to illuminate.

I collected data through participant observation in MA classrooms in three universities in the London area, through in-depth interviews with twelve MA students in two of these universities, and through a focus group discussion with six of the MA students I had interviewed. The methods of data collection I have employed in this study were:

METHOD	DATA
Participant observation; Informal talks with participant MA students; Informal talks with students and lecturers	Field notes; Headnotes (Ottenberg, 1990)
First interviews with students	Tapes of interviews
Transcribing of interviews	Transcripts of interviews; Sets of questions for second interviews
Second interviews with students	Tapes of interviews
Transcribing of interviews	Transcripts of interviews; Selection of quotes from interviews for focus group discussion; Invitations for focus group discussion; Comments from some participant MA students on transcript and on their involvement in this research
Focus group discussion	Tapes of focus group discussion
Transcribing of focus group discussion	Transcripts of focus group discussion
Follow-up meeting with focus group moderator	Script of talk

I have presented the methods of data collection and the data they generated in this form in order to separate out the various elements of data collection for clarity.

The actual process of data collection, however, is not as clear-cut as it might appear in this table. All these various methods of data collection are interweaving, and all the data constantly fed back into the ongoing research process, for example the focus group discussion was stimulated by issues raised in the individual interviews (see section ten below). Agar (1996) observes in *The Professional Stranger* that

in many cases, [...] ethnographically orientated authors from other disciplines (than anthropology) do a better job articulating ethnography than we do. To give just one quick example, Glaser and Strauss came up with the elegant statement that in ethnographic research, data collection and analysis are done concurrently rather than being separately scheduled parts of the research (Agar, 1996, pp.61-62).

Explicating this process further, Agar writes:

You learn something ('collect data'), then you try to make sense out of it ('analysis'), then you go back to see if the interpretation makes sense in light of new experience ('collect more data'), then you refine your interpretation ('more analysis'), and so on. The process is dialectic, not linear (Agar, 1996, p.62).

In other words, the meanings that research participants give to their complex day-to-day world cannot be 'skimmed off' the data and interpretations have to be refined over time as more data are collected and analysed. Agar's view of these processes being 'dialectic, not linear' is also in line with Todorov's perspective on moving in *and* out of the research setting, discussed in section two above.



Methodological perspectives in anthropology have moved on then since Malinowski, whose goal in ethnography was ‘to grasp the native’s point of view’ (Malinowski quoted in Spradley, 1979, p.5). In this study my aim was *not* to get to understand “the natives’” point of view. Arguably, having been an MA student I could be seen to be a ‘native’ myself. However, as discussed in section two above, my identity was not homogenous as it kept shifting from insider to outsider. Similarly, in this case study, I do *not* conceptualise ‘the culture’ of the group of MA students as homogenous, or fixed and static. While some ethnographers still define culture in a way that reflects Malinowski’s objective as the ‘acquired knowledge that people use to interpret experience and generate social behavior’ (Spradley 1979, p.5; his emphasis removed), in this case study I draw on Street’s (1993) concept of culture. Street argues that culture is a verb: *culture does* rather than *is*:

For what culture does is precisely the work of ‘defining words, ideas, things and groups [...] We all live our lives in terms of definitions, names and categories that culture creates’. The job of studying culture is not of finding and then accepting its definitions but of ‘discovering how and what definitions are made, under what circumstances and for what reasons’. [...] Culture is an active process of meaning making and contest over definition, including its own definition (1993, p.25).

Data collection and analysis in this study then aim to shed light on such processes of defining, ‘what definitions are made’ and how, in other words, to link definitions to the underlying assumptions, theories and beliefs that produce them. Street’s definition of culture as a verb is in line with Gee’s (1996) notion of social practices as being constitutive of social identities and his assertion that ‘a discourse is a sort of identity kit’ (Gee, 1996, p.127), as discussed in chapter one, section five. The data that have been ‘collected’ in this case study represent ways



of doing with words: the participant MA students have talked about what they believe participating in a classroom means. They have talked about what they believe being a student, or a teacher, entails. In Heath's terms, they 'talk about these ways of knowing at a "meta" level' (1983, p.339). In Street's terms, they do what culture *does*, they are *actively* involved in processes of 'meaning making and contest over definition'.

In this case study, not only the participant MA students are involved in these processes; I am too. This, it seems to me, is in line with Geertz (1975) who explains 'how much goes into ethnographic description' that makes it what he calls 'thick' description:

In finished anthropological writings [...] that what we call our data are really our own constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to (1975, p.9).

He goes on to explain that 'most of what we need to comprehend a particular event, ritual, custom, idea or whatever *is insinuated as background information* before the thing itself is directly examined' (1975, p.9, my emphasis). My writing this thesis then represents my constructions of the participant MA students' perceptions and constructions of the learning and teaching practices that they encountered on their Master's courses. This 'thick' description is grounded in the students' and my background understanding, which is often 'insinuated' rather than 'directly examined' in the interviews or the focus group discussion.

## **5 Research participants**

As discussed above (see also chapter one, section five), my identity as a student-cum-researcher kept shifting from insider to outsider to the researched group. The identity of the participant MA students can also not be seen as fixed or static. The students' identity kept shifting from being seen and seeing themselves as insiders and 'experts' to being seen and seeing themselves as outsiders and 'novices' in the field of learning and teaching English. This section moves the discussion of the methodological principles that underpin this case study from how the students came to 'access' the research (see also section three above) to how their participation contributed to the construction of the study. Every MA student in the observed groups was a potential research participant but not every student was willing to be interviewed. As will be shown below, the participant MA students had an interest in my area of research. They seemed to reflect on what was happening in their learning and were trying to make sense of what was going on. They had possibly asked themselves questions like why it was that always the same students seemed to participate in class or why some students hardly ever spoke in class but had interesting things to say when they got a chance to talk outside class. Some of the participant MA students engaged more in what went on in their classes than others, but all of them were willing to tell me about their expectations and their observations of their learning. They were prepared to commit time to this study and to be interviewed more than once. I needed to be able to trust that they would keep to their commitment as much as they needed to feel they could trust me.

The students who participated in this case study were female and male students, native and non-native speakers of English, from various teaching backgrounds (Appendix 3.2). They were self-selecting. I asked each participant MA student at the end of their second interview for their reasons for talking to me as their agenda for participating in the research would help illuminate this process of self-selection and, thereby, add an important dimension to the interpretation of the data. Therefore, rather than first discussing the way in which the interviews were conducted (see section six below), I will begin here with the set of three questions (Appendix 3.3) that I asked each participant student at the end of their second interview about how they had perceived their role in the research, what it was they felt they could contribute by, or gain from, participating in the study. Blanche was quoted above as saying I had ‘won her over’ when I had asked her to describe her involvement in the research process. When I asked her why it was that she had agreed to being interviewed, and what it was that she wanted to give in the interviews, and whether there was anything that she thought she was gaining from the interviews, she answered:

I think originally I agreed to being interviewed, because I thought it was an interesting concept, the idea of ethnographic research, the idea that you focus on individuals instead of large numbers of anonymous people, and that intrigued me, the approach. And, I am gaining something from these interviews definitely, I really enjoyed reading what I said the first time, because I could see processes going on in my own adjustment, in my own impressions, and seeing more coherence in what I said than I originally thought there was that sort of builds my confidence a bit, and being able to talk through things and share things is very nice, I think.

(Blanche, 2nd interview, p13)

Racheal, answering the same question about whether there was anything she thought she was gaining from the interviews, said:

Yes, I think that it has made me think, it just makes you think. It makes you think more than you are made to think in most of the lectures, or you are given the opportunity to try to articulate things. You realise how inarticulate you are, and you are trying to think about it a bit more clearly before you open your mouth, you try to not to contradict yourself, you know, that sort of thing. Yes, it does give me some ideas, it does give you some ideas about what you, how your approach could be changed, you know, how my approach to the course could change, whether you're just being blinded sometimes by your irritation at certain situations that you aren't really seeing clearly, [...] because of all the things that happened to me, I had a kind of quite a lot of axes to grind anyway, so maybe it has helped me to get them off my chest in a way to somebody who had the time to listen, because other people get bored after a while. (Both of us laughing.) I mean you might be bored but you just have to be there, other people just change the subject but you can't change the subject.

(Rachael, 2nd interview, p.22)

Alison responded to my question:

MH: Is there anything in the way that I was conducting the interviews that you think should be mentioned, should be talked about? The first one and this one?

Alison: Yeah, maybe the fact that you tried to talk to me first, before you could interview me, I mean you told me about your reasons for such a project, and again I wasn't pressurised into being interviewed, I volunteered, and that's one thing that I appreciated out of this study, because whatever I said, I wasn't pushed into saying it, I said it because I



got the opportunity, I should take this opportunity of saying what I have in mind regarding this course  
(Alison, 2nd interview, p16).

Blanche's, Alison's and Rachael's responses seem to suggest that participating in the study encouraged those who agreed to being interviewed to reflect further on the way they were engaging with their MA classes. (The implications for pedagogy that these responses and the study itself suggest will be discussed in chapter six of the thesis.) While Blanche could see 'processes going on in (her) own adjustment', Rachael felt that her 'approach to the course could change'. The students quoted above also eloquently demonstrate the interest they took in this case study. Blanche was particularly 'intrigued' by the idea of ethnographic research and Rachael felt strongly that I would not 'change the subject'. Alison was very clear that she 'wasn't pressurised into being interviewed' or 'pushed' into it. She appreciated the interview as an 'opportunity' and that she 'should take this opportunity of saying what (she had) in mind regarding (her) course'. All of the participant MA students seemed to see their contribution to this study was invaluable and increasingly, as the study went on, they seemed to bring their own questions and concerns around issues of language, learning, identity, power and knowledge.

The following interview extract can help illuminate the implications that my shifting identities, from 'insider' to 'outsider' and pursuing my research agenda as someone who was no longer an MA student, had on data collection in this case study. When I asked Harry, as I had asked each student at the end of their second interview (see also section six below), about what he thought his role had been in

this research, and about my coming to classes, hanging around and doing interviews, he said:

Harry: My role, I don't think it's any more than just provide data, I must say. And I have been intrigued, I was intrigued by your coming on at first. I think that's when you got on to say you are writing about things, I was intrigued to know sort of what was your angle on the classroom. I suppose in some ways it's almost a bit disappointing that I am the provider of data (Hmm.), and I realise that you don't really want to sort of express too much of what you feel is going on, but I'd find that quite interesting as well.

MH: Hmm. So what you are saying here, if I don't misinterpret it, you would like to get to know more about what I am thinking about all this (Yes.), if you had the chance to interview me.

Harry: Hmm, or just to, to have a dialogue, yeah.  
(Harry, 2nd interview, p13)

It seems that, to Harry's disappointment, my being concerned about giving space and voice to the MA students during the interviews prevented me from hearing that he had said it would be interesting to hear *my* angle. While I was concerned about not destroying 'the story that (was) emerging' (Hill and Anderson, 1993, p.123; see also below) and listening to what *he* had to say, I missed the opportunity to 'have a dialogue' with him. Exploring *his* response to *my* 'angle on the classroom' could have added valuable data to this study. It appears then that being 'perfectly inside' I could *not always* 'detach' myself, in Todorov's terms (see section two above). At the time of interviewing, although I had some distance to being an MA student, I did have *not enough* distance to critically reflect on my

own research practice and the assumptions that ‘undergird a particular act of social inquiry’ (Lather, 1991), as discussed in section one above. I did not yet see clearly enough that researchers *and* research participants are ‘socially located persons’ and that I could have shared my assumptions about ‘the classroom’ with Harry (and other students), as there is no ‘neutral’ research or interview question. This point will be taken up again in chapter seven, with a discussion of Mauthner and Doucet’s (2003) argument that reflexivity is always a partial process.

## 6 Interviews

In the previous sections the methodological decisions that have guided the construction of this case study and issues involved in taking an ethnographic perspective and gaining ‘access’ to the researched group have been discussed. This section will focus on how the interviews with the participant MA students were conducted, *what questions* were asked and *how*. Spradley (1979) in *The Ethnographic Interview* suggests that ‘both questions and answers must be discovered from informants’ (1979, p.84; his emphasis removed). Although his terminology appears to presume a homogenous notion of culture and knowledge (see section four above), a reality ‘out there’ which the interviewer must ‘discover’, his view can help further this discussion. He reminds us that while ‘in most forms of interviewing, questions are distinct from answers (1983, p.83)’, in ethnographic interviewing ‘questions always imply answers (and) statements of any kind always imply questions (1979, p.84)’. Spradley’s notion that questions ‘imply answers’ and answers ‘imply questions’ points to the constructed nature of

ethnographic interviews. Both interviewer and interviewee co-construct the interview as it evolves. As Hill and Anderson (1993) observe:

If interviewers don't actually listen, they will be less tempted to intervene and destroy the story that is emerging. This position sounds bizarre to anyone who assumes that an interviewer closely monitors what is said in order to probe for what is left unsaid (Hill and Anderson 1993, p.123).

Hill and Anderson (1993) assert that 'not listening' is an 'effective counter to the traditional practices (of) interviewers continuously intervening to insure that *their* schedule of questions is strictly followed (1993, p.123; my emphasis). On the one hand, this 'bizarre' observation underlines the importance for interviewers who do ethnographic work to *not* interfere and 'destroy the story that is emerging'. On the other hand, it emphasises the need for researchers to be reflexive about the way in which their data get constructed but also about the possibility that they might, occasionally, miss opportunities when they present themselves, as discussed in section five above.

In this case study, I *did* listen closely to what the MA students said during the interviews in order to be able to take up points that they were making during the interview or to connect what they were saying with issues that could be explored further in the second interviews but, in the first interviews, I mainly left the students to develop their story. My aim was *not* to 'intervene and destroy' the stories that were going to emerge in the interviews. While I opened the first interview with each of the participant MA students in a similar way (see Appendix 3.4), thanking them for participating in the study and confirming what my research interest was, I did not pre-structure the interviews. The interview



questions were not asked to ‘discover’ or establish the participant students reality as ‘typical’ of MA students. The students were aware of the ethnographic nature of the research; they knew that I was not going to ask standardised questions but would leave as much control as possible to them over what they were going to say, or not to say. The methodological decision to conduct unstructured and open-ended interviews is also in line with the nature of this case study as one that searches for a ‘telling case’ rather than a ‘typical’ one, as discussed in section two above. The data ‘collected’ for this case study then *represent* the research participants’ perceptions of their reality *rather than is* their reality. Although this case study aims at representing the social world of the researched group from an insider’s perspective, reflexivity (see also section two above) refers to the need for the researcher to stand back, to keep a distance from his or her data in order to be able to make the connections between the data collected and analytical constructs employed. Ultimately, it is the researcher’s task to draw on theoretical constructs to illuminate the insights and patterns that emerge from the data in order to make a contribution to further develop theory.

The majority of interviews were conducted in empty classrooms in either of the institutions; only four out of a total of twenty-five interviews were done in private places. All first interviews lasted for about thirty minutes; the second interviews lasted up to one hour. Before each interview, I checked the tape recorder, the volume of the recording; I closed windows to shut out the noise of the outside world and to set the interviewee’s and my mind to the interview. Before switching on the tape, I reassured all participant MA students that they would be able to read the transcript of their interview, make any comment but also ask me to *not* use a

particular paragraph for quotation in the thesis should they feel uncomfortable about a specific comment. Although, as it turned out, none of the participant MA students made such a request, it is important to discuss here the role of both interviewer and interviewee in the interview.

Hill and Anderson (1993) in their review article *The Interview as Research Tool* challenge Briggs's (1986) strong commitment to 'ecological validity' in interviewing and his concern with 'the degree to which the circumstances created by the researcher's procedures match those of the everyday world of the subjects (Briggs, 1986, p.24)'. As Hill and Anderson comment, attempting to 'match' any interview with any other interview or speech event is highly problematic as it presumes that it is possible, or even desirable, to carry out research interviews in a way that could be seen as 'natural' to the participants' ways of interacting in their 'natural' environment. Barton's (1994) observation about the notion of 'ecological validity', which calls for researchers to be true to the research participants' context, is useful here. He notes that researchers 'use the term to question whether *experimental studies of psychological activity* are valid reflections of natural everyday contexts (1994, p.30)'. This case study, however, is not a psychological study that begins with 'a priori definitions of knowledge and learning' (see section four above). Instead, it takes as its starting point the question 'what counts as knowledge and learning in classrooms to teachers and students? (Greene and Bloome, 1997, p.191)'. Here then, research participants are not presumed to be interviewed in 'ecologically valid' and 'natural everyday contexts'. Doing research from an ethnographic perspective does, nevertheless, require researchers like myself to enter the world of the research participants. If

the aim is to understand the participants' social world better, it is necessary to observe and participate in their everyday activities and to learn and speak their language. The important point then is that the researcher needs to be reflexive about the way in which his or her entering the research setting impacts on and changes that very context.

Hill and Anderson (1993) in fact suggest that Briggs, due to 'his own commitment to ethnography (p.123)', would consider approaching research interviews in a way that builds on the interviewee's understanding:

first, investigating the potential interviewee's understanding of an interview and then using that knowledge to structure interviewing practices (which may or may not accord with everyday norms of communication) (Hill and Anderson 1993, p.123).

In this study, the participant MA students have responded to my interviewing practices as much as I have responded to the understandings that they brought to the interviews. During the interviews, there was a mutual agreement as to who did what; there was no doubt about my being in control of what was going on.

However, our roles in the interviews were not fixed and some students felt free to comment on my questions, or asked me questions, and elaborated their answers at great length. It seems that Rachael perceived her position in the interview as quite powerful. As quoted above (section five), she said that I (the interviewer) could not 'change the subject' because, it appears, at this point in the interview she saw herself a position to put forward *her* agenda for the interview. She may also have seen my agenda of 'collecting data' as constraining my room for manoeuvre. The

contrary was also the case. At times, some participants responded with fairly short answers, expecting *me* to move on to my next question.

While in the first interviews the participant MA students and I were mapping out the ground we wanted to cover, the second interviews represent a different set of data. The important shift is that in the second interviews I began to feed back initial analysis of the first interviews into data collection. First, before the actual second interview started, I told each student that I had transcribed the first interview. I said that I would like them to read through the transcript not only to possibly fill in blanks in the transcript, which I had marked (INAUDIBLE), but also to encourage them to comment on the transcript of the first interview or to make notes on things that they wanted to explore further in the second interview which was about to start. I also reminded the students that since the first interview there probably had been things that had gone through their mind, or maybe they had made observations, that they might want to talk about in the second interview. I told each student that I had analysed the first interviews and prepared a set of note-cards with questions and themes that I wanted to explore further in the second interview: things that they had touched upon in their first interviews but also a set of three questions about their experience of doing the course that I wanted to ask each student (Appendix 3.5).

Second, I asked each student to answer two ‘technical’ questions: 1) to give me a pseudonym to replace their real name in the thesis, and 2) to describe their teaching background in a few words (Appendix 3.6). Then, I told each student that I had another set of three questions (Appendix 3.3; see also section five



above) about their role and involvement in this research, which I was going to ask at the very end of their second interview. Finally, while I was going through the routine of checking tape-recorders and closing windows, the students were reading the transcript of their first interview and made notes, mentally or in writing (Appendix 3.7) of the things they wanted to talk about. When they were ready, I switched on the tape-recorder and we started the second interview. I had laid out my note-cards on the table so that I could fit my questions into the interview when I could see a link to what the student was talking about, or when there was a natural pause and opportunity to move on.

## **7 Focus group discussion**

‘Doing research’ has given me the authority to come to MA classrooms, observe, make contact with and interview students. It appears that this case study, and specifically the focus group discussion, has also given the participant students the authority to formulate not only their contribution to this research project but also their response to the MA courses they had been taking:

I think what has been going on in this discussion is some sort of evaluation of our courses. And I think, maybe, if it were possible for some of our lecturers, or course directors, to attend a discussion such as this, maybe, this would help to a great extent instead of at the end of the course, you know, they just hurriedly call us to make a course evaluation, and sometimes we just see that they are just carrying it out because they feel that it’s an exercise that needs to be done, they’ve got to do it. And you really ask yourself whether they will do anything about what you’ve said. (Alison, Focus group discussion, pp.42-43)

In Alison's experience course evaluations have been 'hurriedly' done as an 'exercise' her lecturers had to do. In contrast, she feels, the focus group discussion was 'some sort of evaluation' which, if her lecturers or course directors could 'attend a discussion such as this', could go some way towards students and lecturers engaging in genuine dialogue about the course. Such a discussion, she feels, would *not* leave her asking herself 'whether they will do anything about what you've said' but instead generate the opportunity to consider ways forward together. The implications of such an approach not only for research but also for pedagogy will be discussed in chapter six (section three and section four).

Morgan (1997, vii) observes that focus groups are 'now a much more widely practiced research method within the social sciences' than they were when he published the first edition of his book *Focus Groups as Qualitative Research* in 1988. Focus groups were then widely used in marketing research, where the aim was *not* to establish what or who is 'right' or 'wrong' but rather to generate ideas and opinions around a theme by listening and responding to what is said as the focus group discussion evolves. Morgan (1997) broadly defines focus groups as 'a research technique that collects data through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher' (1997, p.6). He suggests that there are both advantages and disadvantages to this technique. Compared to participant observation, the main advantage of focus groups is the opportunity to generate data through the participants' interaction on a theme or topic 'based on the researcher's ability to assemble and direct the focus group sessions. This control is also a disadvantage, however, because it means that focus groups are in some

sense unnatural social settings (Morgan, 1997, p.8)'. Compared to individual interviews, the

advantage of focus groups as an interview technique lies in their ability to observe interaction on a topic. Group discussions provide direct evidence about similarities and differences in the participants' opinions and experiences as opposed to reaching such conclusions from post hoc analyses of separate statements from each interviewee. [...] Focus groups (a) require greater attention to the role of the moderator and (b) provide less depth and detail about the opinions and experiences of any given participant (Morgan, 1997, p.10).

Focus groups then generate data that cannot be obtained with either of the other two methods. First, the direction of focus group discussions can be guided by the researcher's focus, while it has to be acknowledged that they are 'in some sense unnatural settings'. Second, focus groups provide data through the participants' interaction in response to each others' contributions to the discussion. Richardson (1994), for example, taped the interaction of groups of viewers of a television episode on poverty in Britain so the 'conversation after the screening [...] could then take the form of a discussion between them, rather than an interview controlled entirely by (her)' (1994, p.96). Morgan makes a similar point when he writes:

Because the researcher defines the discussion topics, focus groups are more controlled than participant observation, and because of the *participant-defined* nature of group interaction the focus group setting is less controlled than individual interviewing (Morgan, 1997, p.16; my emphasis).

In focus group discussions then research participants are in a position to shape and define the way in which the interaction develops. In this case study, the students who had come to their MA classes and found me there as a participant observer could not leave their classes but had to sit through them, whether they did or did not like my being there. They could, however, decide *not* to be interviewed. The students who did agree to participate and be interviewed decided to make a contribution to the study but some, as was discussed above, could also see their contribution as being beneficial to themselves (see also chapter six). As discussed in section six above, data were constructed in the interviews rather than ‘collected’. The focus group discussion then created a context where the MA students who took part could *interact* and respond to each other without the pressure to say something that the one-to-one interviews may have presented at times. In the focus group discussion students could generate their own questions as well as respond to questions and comments but they could also ‘lean back’ and reflect on what had been said and then respond, or not.

In the invitation to the focus group discussion that I sent to all participant MA students (Appendix 3.8), I explained what *my* expectations were. I also included a quote in which one of the students talked about *her* expectations:

MH: What would you want this focus group to be like?

Alison: Yeah, I would very much like to have people from Central University here, because I'd like to know what their experiences are as people studying in a different British institution from the one that I am studying in, so that I could know whether what I experienced they too are also experiencing, so really I would like to have them here, and again I



would like a friendly environment. I mean I would like everybody to see the focus group as something not intimidating, as a place where people are just going to say whatever they have in mind about the courses that they have gone through without having to make, to offend anybody, you know, just, and everybody really shouldn't be defensive about anything, because people would just be saying, I think people would just be saying their experiences. At least this is what I'm going to do, to just say my experiences, and that's not to try and apportion blame on anybody, which will just be a way of saying what I have experienced in the course. And I hope that will be the spirit. And even if somebody comes up with a different view, it's their own experience, I mean I can't expect them to have a similar experience just like myself, because we look at things differently.

(Alison, 2nd interview, p17)

The meeting of the focus group created an opportunity for the students to meet other participant MA students, an opportunity which they would not have had otherwise. Alison, as we can see, welcomed this opportunity. In fact, the focus group discussion itself demonstrates that all six students who participated (Alex, Alison, John, Linda, Maya, and Rachael) took this opportunity to exchange experiences and views. The data this focus group interaction generated has added valuable insights to this case study, as the analysis in the following chapters will show.

Comparing focus groups with individual interviews, Morgan (see above) reminded us that focus group settings are 'less controlled' due to the 'participant-defined nature of group interaction (Morgan, 1997, p.16)' and that, therefore, focus groups require 'greater attention to the role of the moderator (Morgan, 1997, p.10)'. I would argue however, that these points are valid not only in a

comparative discussion of interview and focus group techniques in qualitative research but, more importantly, in a discussion of the methodological decisions that the researcher/interviewer/moderator has taken in the construction of his or her study and the co-construction of his or her data with the research participants. Section six above has provided such a reflexive discussion of how the interview data got co-constructed in this case study. The remainder of this section will offer an account of how the focus group data were collected, or rather co-constructed.

When I designed this case study, I took the decision not to take a leading role in the focus group discussion as the moderator but rather take a supporting role as co-moderator. I felt that I might not be able to stimulate the interaction, trying to hold its threads together, because the students might see me as already ‘knowing’ what each participant had said in the individual interviews. I also did not want to interfere with the flow of the focus group discussion but rather allow the stories to ‘emerge’ (Hill and Anderson, 1993; see also discussion in section five above).

James, one of the students whom I had interviewed for my MA dissertation (Hermerschmidt, 1993), agreed to take on the role of the moderator in the focus group discussion. James (pseudonym), after completing the MA course at Riverside University had gone on to pursue another MA degree at Central University. Being an MA student again, if on a different course, he was still an insider of the researched group when, at the same time, he was an outsider to the particular MA groups and courses that this case study is concerned with. Like myself, he could, in Todorov’s (1988) terms, be ‘inside *and* outside’ the researched group. He, too, could be ‘perfectly inside’ *and* ‘detached’ (see also discussion in section two and section three above). The focus group moderator

added his own valuable contribution to the development and the outcome of the discussion as he shared his unique insight into and experience of being an MA student with the participant MA students in the focus group. He also discussed his insights with me, the MA student-cum-researcher, before the focus group discussion but also in a follow-up interview with him.

Prior to the focus group gathering, we discussed the relevant methodological decisions that I had taken such as his leading role and my supporting role in the discussion. We discussed that we would *not* ‘insist’ on what Maya called a ‘typical western idea’:

Maya: I think this is typical Western idea, that’s what I think. In West, people try to insist, you know, your opinion in public, but where I’m from, you know, my country, from Japan, [...] we can communicate without speaking, sometimes with silence.

(Maya, Focus group discussion, p.20)

The main concern then was to create for the participant MA students an opportunity to speak in the discussion, but also to be comfortable with silence and not to feel that silences or pauses could threaten the ‘success’ of the focus group discussion.

On the day of the focus group discussion, I set up the room, arranged tables in a way that all participants would be able to see each other face-to-face. I set up two microphones, connected the two tape recorders, and made sure I had spare batteries and blank tapes. The discussion lasted for nearly two hours and produced data *through the students’ interaction*. In the follow-up interview that I conducted

with James, he observed: ‘We were there as moderators, but they were *speaking to one another*’ (Focus group moderator, notes on moderating, p.2; my emphasis).

I also put the following question (and elaboration on the question) to James:

MH: To what degree did you feel you were in control of what was going on during the focus group discussion? I am not suggesting that you were not in control, but should have been, or the other way round. This is a general question about whether you had the feeling you were in control or not.

James: Yes, in the sense that at no stage did I feel uncomfortable about being there. Secondly, in the sense that, although I didn’t impose topics for discussion, with some of the questions it was even difficult to put them into the discussion, because they came up differently. The focus group achieved what I felt, we felt, it should achieve. We felt being part of the group, it became a natural environment.

(Focus group moderator, notes on moderating, p.1)

James felt that he did not have to ‘impose topics for discussion’ as ‘they came up differently’. The methodological point argued here then is that in this case study the participant MA students did indeed *interactively* construct the focus group data. Such data could not have been generated through either individual interviews or participant observation (see also discussion above). Furthermore, the researcher (co-moderator) and co-researcher (moderator) were indeed *in control* of the discussion, making sure that ‘the focus group achieved what [...] we felt it should achieve’, feeling ‘part of the group’ at the same time, thus being ‘detached’ *and* ‘perfectly inside’ (see above). Finally, James suggested that



one of the people who were going on and on – if our teachers had been there, they would have been surprised, because it was something that, referring to the classes, there had been that feeling that they had nothing to say.

(Focus group moderator, notes on moderating, p.2)

While the implications of his observation for pedagogical practice will be discussed in chapter six (section four), here a significant final methodological point can be added. While it is necessary that Morgan draws attention to both advantages and disadvantages of the focus group method (see above), suggesting that the moderator's ability to 'assemble and direct the focus group sessions' creates 'unnatural social settings' (1997, p.8), it would appear that in this case study the focus group, in James' words, 'became a natural environment'. As James observed, 'the whole thing of being judged, looked at, my intelligence being questioned in terms of how I speak was not there, and people just went on (Focus group moderator, notes on moderating, p.2)'. (See chapter six for further discussion of implications for research and pedagogy.)

## **8 Transcripts**

The process of transcribing interviews or focus group discussions is not unproblematic as transcripts are representations not only of what was said but also of how it was said. As Finnegan (1992) points out, those who transcribe recorded material bring their 'own assumptions about the nature of "a text" and about the relation between written words and performance which transcriptions in some sense represent' (1992, p.195) to this process. In other words, there is a need for researchers to be as explicit as possible about the decisions they have taken with

regard to what they included in the written transcript of the oral interview, but also with regard to what was left out, and why. In the transcripts I have marked pauses, laughter, and inaudible stretches of talk; I also highlighted words or groups of words in italics when the interviewee had put special emphasis on them. The texts of the transcripts did not get changed after I first transcribed them, except when the MA students had been able to fill in gaps in the transcript which I had marked (INAUDIBLE), or to correct typing errors. I did *not* include pauses in the transcripts when, in my judgement at the time of transcribing, they were merely indicating that the student, native *or* non-native speaker of English, had been ‘fishing’ for a word. While I do not assume that I can be ‘right’ in all those judgements, I felt that those pauses could not add anything to the analysis of the data. However, I did mark pauses when the momentary silence seemed to indicate that it could be relevant to the analysis. For example, in Blanche’s interview (see chapter six, section six), I marked a long pause, where she had taken a moment to formulate her response to my question:

MH: You were saying in your first interview actually that you want the other teachers to change their approaches. Could you maybe say once again [...] what is wrong with their approach do you think?

Blanche: Well, (long pause) I just think that they are not sensitive, I mean I've said that already, but I think they are just not sensitive to the possible capabilities, or the needs, of their ESL students, and it could be because they have so many students to look after, they feel 'well, I shouldn't have to do more for this one'. I don't know, but that's what's wrong with their approaches on the whole I think, and they are just not in tune with the fact that these students need special help, and they don't try to change themselves, they think that the student has to change kind of.

(Blanche, 2nd interview, p.7)

At the time of transcribing, I could not have been sure whether this long pause would be significant in the analysis. As the extract below shows, the analysis in chapter six focuses on Blanche's students' 'possible capabilities' that she feels some of her colleagues might be overlooking and on the discourse of 'deficits', underlying her colleagues approach:

In pointing out that some of her colleagues 'are just not sensitive to the *possible capabilities*, or the needs, of their ESL students' (my emphasis), Blanche locates her colleagues' approach in a *discourse of student 'deficits'*.

(Chapter six, section six; emphasis added)

At the time of transcribing, I would not have been in a position to take the decision whether or how Blanche's long pause might or might not be significant in the analysis and the argument developed in the thesis. The focus of the analysis of her comment in chapter six is on her concern to develop a conceptual understanding of her ESL students' 'needs' and capabilities. This analysis is embedded in the assumption that language and 'language needs' are socially constructed. The long pause then, while marked in the transcript, became irrelevant to my interpretation of Blanche's comment.

I marked laughter in the transcripts when, at the time of transcribing, I felt that it could be relevant to the analysis, possibly indicating that the student felt that s/he and I were assuming roles of (almost) equal power in the interview, or that s/he assumed that I knew exactly what he or she was talking about, but also when the

laughter could have helped smooth over a feeling of unease around what had been said. In Rachael's (section five above) interview, for example, I marked that both of us were laughing. The laughter suggests that there was a shared understanding that 'other people get bored after a while' but also an element of easing the fact that Rachael had just said that she felt she had 'quite a lot of axes to grind'. The analysis above suggests that Rachael felt strongly that I would not 'change the subject', a point that does not specifically draw on the laughter that we shared in the interview and its underlying possible meanings. Transcribing then involves that we make decisions such as the ones discussed here. Finnegan's (1992) view that transcribing is a process of translating is helpful here:

One has to face the problem that transcription, like translation, is inevitably a value-laden and disputed process' (1992, p.198).

The decisions then made in this process of 'translating' are open to contestation and, therefore, need to be made explicit and discussed. It is with the interpretations of the transcripts that data analysis in this study is concerned with.

In the interview transcripts I also included false starts and back channels such as 'hmm' or 'ehm'. A speaker can use those to fill a pause while trying to find a word, keeping the flow of the speech going. There are instances in the transcripts, however, where I inserted a (Hmm.) in brackets. In those instances they were uttered by a speaker (by me, or a student) in a way that was overlapping someone's ongoing speech, indicating interest in what was being said and encouraging the one who speaks to carry on. I also included phrases like 'you know', or 'I mean' in the transcripts because, besides their function of keeping up



the flow of the speech, they also allow for some processing of what has been said and of what needs to be said, or not. The issue of punctuation, of where sentences ended and new ones started in the interviews, has to remain unresolved. I took the decision of where to put a full stop on the basis of where I could hear the end of a statement, or an idea.

**9      Data analysis feeding back into data collection: Interviews**

The following sections will make explicit the process of data analysis from the first interviews to the second interviews, and from the interviews to the focus group discussion. As outlined in section five ‘data’ collection, the various kinds of data underwent preliminary analyses and were constantly fed back into data collection. Field notes that I took during and after observations (see also section three above) or after informal talks with students and lecturers, form the corpus of secondary data that back up and inform the analysis of the primary data: the transcripts of the interviews and the focus group discussion. The following table shows how many hours of tapes were transcribed (for full details see Appendix 3.9):

Total hours of recorded and transcribed interview and focus group data:

First and second interviews	1,039 minutes	17 hours, 19 minutes
Focus group discussion	106 minutes	1 hour, 46 minutes

As I was transcribing the first interviews, I was listening again, ‘immersing myself’ (Agar, 1996, p.153) and getting a sense of the interviews as a whole. As Agar (1996) points out,

in the initial stages of fieldwork, it’s a good idea to transcribe tapes completely. [...] At the beginning, one should lay out the entire stretch of talk to see what one has (1996, p.153).

As discussed in section six above, I shared the transcripts of the first interview with the students before their second interviews. I transcribed the tapes of the first interviews, the second interviews and the whole of the focus group discussion completely. Rather than using the ‘analytical tools known as pencil and scissors (Agar, 1996, p.153)’, I kept the transcribed interviews intact. In the initial stages of data analysis, working from the transcripts of the first interviews to conducting the second interviews, I followed grounded theory procedures (Glaser and Strauss 1967). The first step was to recognise the ‘themes’, ‘codes’, and ‘categories’ in the interview transcripts, and to identify the ones that reoccurred in the interview of a particular MA student but also across interviews with other participant students. The second step was to identify the categories that existed in the body of theories relating to those themes or codes. Three broad ‘organising themes’ (Stierer, 2000) emerged from the data at this first stage: the theme of belonging, the theme of knowledge, and the theme of development. However, it also emerged that these themes covered theoretical territory that was neither clear-cut nor easily put into ‘categories’. Agar’s (1997) point that you ‘begin *building a map of the territory*’ (p.154; my emphasis) is helpful here as it aptly describes the way in which I ‘conjured up’ those broad themes in order to help me make sense of the

data and focus on what I had heard the students say under the analytical umbrella of those broad organising themes.

What I heard students say within the analytical theme of belonging was around issues of their identity, issues of language dominance and ideology in language, and also around what the students perceived as *their* knowledge. What I heard students say within the broad theme of knowledge was around issues to do with the institution they had come to, around academic discourse, around the relationship between language and identity and authority, but also around the relationship between language, knowledge and power, around issues of interaction, participation and assessment, and around the relationship between teachers/lecturers and learners/students. What I heard students say within the theme of development was around issues of learning and self-development, around evaluation, around the notion of process, and the notion of achievement. All these themes overlap, they talk to many layers of one thing, they are also one thing seen from different perspectives. I felt that they could *not* be coded in the way that grounded theory suggests (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Furthermore, grounded theory procedures appear not to have room to take account of the jointly constructed nature of the data in this case study, or to take account of shifting identities or power relations in research interviews. As Charmaz (1995) observes:

Glaser and Strauss (1967, Glaser 1978) imply in their early works that the categories inhere in the data and may even leap out at the researcher. I disagree. Rather, the categories reflect the interaction between the observer and observed. Certainly any observer's worldview, disciplinary assumptions, theoretical proclivities and research interests will influence his or her observations and emerging categories. Grounded theorists attempt to use their background assumptions, proclivities and interests to

sensitize them to look for certain issues and processes in their data (1995, p.32).

Silverman (1993) makes a similar point:

‘Grounded theory’ has been criticised for its failure to acknowledge implicit theories which guide work at an early stage (1993, p.47).

As discussed in section one above, there is a need for researchers to be reflexively aware of the theoretical assumptions that they bring to their research which not only ‘sensitise them to look for certain issues and processes in their data’ but determine what they notice during their observations, what interview questions they ask, what links they make in their analyses, and how they represent their data and findings.

However, at the time when I was engaged in analysing the first interviews, being under time pressure to get it done so I could schedule a second interview, when I was transcribing and analysing more interviews, I did not have the distance to critically rethink grounded theory as an approach to data analysis. However, intuitively I felt that grounded theory can ‘degenerate into a fairly empty building of categories (Silverman 1993, p.47)’. The compromise I made, which allowed me to keep up with my interview schedule, was to analyse the first interviews under the umbrella of the broad themes I had identified but not to identify any categories or codes too soon which I felt could only entrap and narrow my view rather than my focus. Rather than going back to the second interviews with such narrow categories, I had formulated sets of questions and grouped them broadly around those themes of belonging, knowledge, and development. I took those



questions as they could help me fit them into the flow of the second interviews as they evolved (see also section six above).

## **10 Data analysis feeding back into data collection: Focus group discussion**

Apart from formulating questions to explore further some of the issues around those three broad themes (belonging, knowledge, and development), I also selected quotes from each participant students' first interview. I printed those quotes under each students' name (pseudonym) and asked the students whether they would give me permission to use these quotes to stimulate the focus group discussion, if needed. Having the students' permission to use their quotes as stimuli, I assigned the following eight letter codes to the quotes:

- L language, domination
- I involvement of students and teachers
- ID identity, presentation of self
- S/D self-development
- E evaluation
- D discourse, knowing the game
- T teaching
- K knowledge

This enabled me to group the quotes in relation to these codes rather than the students' names (pseudonyms). This initial 'coding' was also helpful in

identifying the issues that the students had brought up in the interview and in linking them with analytical concepts such as ‘identity’ or ‘discourse’, inspiring further reading of the research literature. However, at this point of the analysis, I was getting ready to move back into data collection and the purpose of taking these quotes to the focus group was to stimulate and inspire the discussion. I thus felt that these ‘organising codes’ needed to be less confining and less ‘leading’ along the lines of these analysis-driven codes. I thus re-grouped the quotes under the following four learning-and-teaching-experience driven headings which, I felt, could also help focus the discussion:

Language

Learning

Teaching

The Master’s degree

While the second interviews had been conducted with the aim of exploring *deeper* the issues that the students had brought up in the first interviews, the focus group had the aim to allow new responses to these issues through the *interaction* in the discussion. (see Appendix 3.10; see also discussion in section seven above).

## **11 Data analysis: Linking linguistic and social inquiry**

As discussed above, data collection in this case study did not assume that there was a single social reality ‘out there’ in the research field that could be captured and then analysed. The epistemological framework (chapter two) that underpins

this study assumes that social reality and social practices, including research practices, are constructed rather than ‘given’. The data here have been collected from an emic, or insider’s, perspective (see section two above) in order to explore issues of language learning and teaching from the students’ perspectives. It is clearly a limitation of this study that no data were collected from lecturers or tutors who also have their own insider’s perspective, as recent research (Lea and Street, 1998; Read et al., 2001) has shown. Their studies and the present study call for further investigation and exploration of the differences that exist in perceptions of academic learning and teaching practices from different insiders’ points of view (see chapter seven, section four).

The contribution that this study can make, then, to better understand those differences of views and perceptions is by drawing on the *students’* insights, ideas, and questions. The analysis has the aim of establishing the students’ ‘personal narratives’ (Hymes 1996; see discussion in chapter six, section five) as valuable forms of knowledge in the context of academic knowledge-making and interpreting, thus illuminating and reinforcing the link between language and identity, and issues of authority and power in academic learning that this study set out to examine. The aim, ultimately, is to make a contribution in response to what Gee refers to as Hymes’s ‘call for both a new research agenda and a new linguistic world view (Gee, 1998, p.248)’. Hymes’s (1996) wrote:

What one needs at the base of the enterprise is something neither social science nor linguistics separately much provide - *a social inquiry that does not abstract from verbal particulars, and linguistic inquiry that connects verbal particulars, not with a model of grammar or discourse in general, but with social activities and relationships* [...] the social scientist lacks

the observational skills and the linguist lacks the framework for making the connections (Hymes, 1996, p.87, my emphasis).

The research methodology in this case study, then, connects linguistic *and* social science analytic tools in order to illuminate the students' take on what was going on in their MA courses and to help understand their reality as students, as represented in the transcripts of the interviews and the focus group discussion. In the analysis of the data, as Hymes suggests, I will *not* separate the linguistic inquiry from the social inquiry. I will link linguistic practices where evident with the social practices, social relationships and the knowledge in which they are institutionally and epistemologically embedded.

In the analysis I am using myself as a research tool: my own observations and my questions as insider and outsider to the group of MA students, my moving *inside and beyond* the field of applied linguistics, taking an ethnographic perspective (Green and Bloome, 1997) and drawing on social science analytic concepts and tools. Using myself as a research tool involves using my insider *and* outsider perspectives (Todorov, 1988) as a non-native speaker of English and my ever-increasing awareness of the limitations of these perspectives. I am also using my heightened awareness that what outsiders and 'novices' notice, ask, or challenge, which may well go unnoticed and unchallenged by insiders and 'experts', may have the potential to contribute to a broader and deeper insight into the teaching and learning practices this study seeks to understand better. As a teacher/lecturer I can draw on knowledge and experience in my professional and academic field but, as a student-cum-researcher into issues of language in education, I can self-reflexively examine teaching and learning practices and share my findings with



colleagues and discuss possible changes to ‘accepted’ and currently privileged practices.

As discussed in section one above, research ‘subjects’ are themselves ‘active and reflexive beings’ (Cameron et al.,1992) who share *their* knowledge and experience in the research process. While this knowledge and expertise that MA students are able to draw on in their written work might potentially contribute to the knowledge base of their academic disciplines, tutors read their students’ papers mainly for assessment purposes. Geisler (1995) observes that much of student writing at university takes place in

a culture of knowledge consumption – not the culture of knowledge production inhabited by members of the academic professions (1995, p.117).

In contrast to this experience of not being in a position to have their insights valued in their writing for assessment, in the research interviews in this case study the participant MA students and I valued their expertise in various professional contexts, and their perceptions of the teaching and learning practices they encountered on their MA programmes. The insights that the MA students have contributed to my dialogue with them during this research has not only been invaluable to this study but can also be utilized to enhance teachers’ and learners’ understanding of the social processes and relationships that are embedded in teaching and learning in other educational settings, not just in language teaching.

## 12 Proximity and distance

In this chapter the concern has been to foreground the relationship between the epistemological and methodological assumptions that underpin this case study. I have been as explicit as possible and necessary about the decisions I have taken that have shaped and driven this research from an ethnographic and emic perspective so as to enable the reader to develop a sense of having ‘been there’ too (Geertz, 1988, p.5). I have made explicit how proximity *and* distance (Todorov, 1988) to the experience of being an MA student have been used as a research tool and discussed how my status as insider *and* outsider to the researched group has enhanced but also limited this study. However, drawing on my own and the students’ insights as novices and professionals, the study can employ linguistic and social science analytic tools and help illuminate links between the linguistic and the social in language learning and teaching practices that might go unnoticed or, when unrecognised, might cause misinterpretation or even misjudgement. As Hymes (1996) observes,

for many ethnographers, it is of the essence of the method that it is a dialectical, or feed-back (or interactive-adaptive) method. It is of the essence of the method that initial questions may change during the course of inquiry (Hymes 1996, p.7).

Taking such a ‘dialectical’ approach in this case study then will not generate ‘findings’ but interpretations of data that are decidedly open for further investigation and exploration. In this sense, then, this study calls for further ‘interactive-adaptive’ studies that seek to establish conceptual links between

linguistic and social practices which ‘previously were ineluctable’ (Mitchell, 1884; see section two).

The methodological issues explored in this chapter have vital implications for both research and pedagogy (see chapter six and seven). The participant MA students are seen here as active and reflexive players, whose experience counts in the construction and negotiation of their knowledge and the knowledge of others, including their teachers’ or, as is the case in this study, the researcher’s knowledge (see also Stein and Mamabolo, 2005; Rowsell and Rajaratnam, 2005). The analysis in the following chapters will demonstrate that teachers/lecturers, researchers, and learners/students can enhance their understanding of linguistic and social issues related to language learning and teaching by listening to the participant MA students’ contributions to this case study, some of whom might have been prejudged as having ‘nothing to say’. While this chapter has offered an explicit account of the methodological approach taken here to questioning and analysing, the analysis in the following chapters will show that the students’ critical and reflexive insights and contributions made possible the connection between linguistic and social inquiry into the link between language learning and teaching practices and identity and knowledge construction that this case study set out to explore.

## CHAPTER 4

### GAPS IN PERCEPTIONS OF ‘APPROPRIATENESS’ AND LANGUAGE ‘COMPETENCE’

**How might the understanding of English as discourse affect the teaching of English internationally? I would argue that the teaching of English for communicative competence is in itself inadequate as a language-teaching goal if English teachers are interested in exploring how language shapes the subjectivities of their students and how it is implicated in power and dominance.**

Peirce, 1989, p.406

#### **1      The issue of language: making the connections between the linguistic and the social**

*I had that problem at first of doubting my language competence, maybe because I'm in a country where I feel I'm among the people who own the language*

*Linda, Focus group discussion, p.14*

As discussed in the previous chapters, data analysis in this study connects insights gained through both linguistic and social science analytic tools and aims to make a contribution to our understanding of the complex ways in which multiple identity positions and social relationships impact on the perspectives and expectations that students bring to their MA courses. Header quotes from the interviews and the focus group discussion have been used to help structure this and the subsequent data analysis chapters (five and six). Crucially, these and all other student quotes also demonstrate that the participant MA students' insights have contributed to construct the knowledge that will help us understand some of the gaps in students' and lecturers' perceptions of 'appropriateness' and



‘competence’ in language learning and teaching. As outlined in chapter three, the study aims to offer understandings which the linguist who ‘lacks the framework for making the connections’ (Hymes, 1996, p.87) might miss when working within a framework of discourse with a small ‘d’ rather than a capital ‘D’. (For a discussion of Discourse with a capital ‘D’ see also chapter two, section seven.) Hymes suggests a framework for inquiry and analysis that ‘connects verbal particulars [...] with social activities and relationships’ (1996, p.87). This is in line with Peirce’s (1989) observation that a framework of discourse as it is used in sociolinguistics, for example, is inadequate ‘if we are to understand why language in general, and English in particular, is not neutral’ (1989, p.404). She asserted that ‘the discourses of the classroom [...] are implicated in relations of power within which participants take up different subject positions, positions that are constituted by language’ (Peirce, 1989, p.405; see also chapter two, section six).

In this study then, as outlined in chapter three, section eleven *Data analysis: linking linguistic and social inquiry*, as a language teacher-cum-student, I make use of my understanding of the linguistic system and the way in which language works, but as a student-cum-researcher in education, I connect my understanding of the nature of language with my insights into and experience of currently privileged teaching and learning practices in higher education. Data analysis here, then, while also taking account of linguistic features of the interview and focus group data, aims to unravel the Discourses with a capital ‘D’ that the participant MA students brought to the research interviews and focus group discussion but also, prior to this, to their lectures, seminars, tutorials, group work and to the efforts they made to understand and meet the expectations, criteria and demands

of their courses. During the focus group discussion, Linda explained how ‘the question of language sometimes becomes an issue’:

We come to the MA course being professionals already, most people who are in the course are not students who are fresh from high school, so we have lots of questions about what is expected of us. [...] There were times when I felt I had lacked confidence in the way I presented my work, because it would depend on how the lecturer would see it. And if it perhaps misrepresented my ideas, then it would give a bad reflection on me as an individual, and maybe representing people from the country that I come from, then there are lots of questions. And the question of language sometimes becomes an issue, you ask yourself [...] does this make sense, shouldn't, could I have had a better word than this? And it is only until I came here that I had that problem at first of doubting my language competence, maybe because I'm in a country where I feel I'm among the people who own the language, but back home I don't think it would have been the problem, I would submit anything with full confidence, so I feel that that has an effect too on the way we expect help.

(Linda, Focus group discussion, pp.13-14)

Linda here poignantly describes the complexity and multitude of concerns that she brought to her course and her assignments which impact on how and why ‘language sometimes becomes an issue’. Her concerns about the issue of language do not focus on issues of language or discourse with a small ‘d’ but on issues that language and Discourse with a big ‘D’ raise because of her keen awareness of who she is: ‘We come to the MA course being professionals already’. This sense of identity as a professional used to reassure her ‘back home’ where she ‘would submit anything with confidence’. On her MA course, however, she appears to have had an acute sense of vulnerability where she ‘had that problem at first of

doubting my language competence'. Linda's concern about her language 'competence' does not stem from her feeling she could not write competently but rather from a feeling that she was not using *her* language: 'maybe because I'm in a country where I feel I'm among the people who own the language'. Notions of language 'competence' or 'standards' in spoken and in written language are often underpinned by Chomsky's assumptions about an *idealised* 'native' speaker which are still very powerful in theories of language learning and teaching, as discussed in chapter two (section three). His notion of competence however is far removed from the experience of *real* speakers, native and non-native, in any real language context, as the discussion of the MA student's experience of being 'judged on the same yardstick with the native speakers' (chapter two, section three) has shown. Similar to Linda, he felt: 'I'm not speaking my language, I'm not myself. There was that sudden sort of loss of identity'. Their concerns then do not raise linguistic issues of language 'competence' but issues of who has *ownership* over a language (see also chapter two, section four) and what kind of and whose 'competence' *is judged to be* competent and appropriate language use (see also section four below).

Linda asking herself: 'could I have a better word than this' also does not raise 'language' issues of a purely linguistic nature but go beyond the words on the page, raising issues of *identity* and representation of self and others in language learning. As Ivanič and Simpson (1992) observe,

whereas we all have the option to 'be ourselves' and 'speak with our own voice' when talking, we are under pressure to submerge our individual identities when writing. [...] So there is no ready-made alternative variety of written English for someone wanting to 'write with my own voice'.



Rather, it is a question of making choices from a range of alternatives within academic writing, trying to find ones which are most in harmony with our sense of ourselves (Ivanič and Simpson, 1992, p.142).

Linda's concerns appear to resonate with Ivanič and Simpson's assertion that 'we are under pressure to submerge our individual identities when writing'. Her comment demonstrates that her *making choices from a range of alternatives* is indeed about the way in which she represents herself 'as an individual' and the 'people from the country' in her writing to her lecturers. Issues such as the ones raised by Linda's observations then cannot be addressed and analysed from a purely linguistic perspective but call for a broader social perspective that can take account of the social identities and relationships which impact on the ways in which students approach and make judgements about their speaking, writing and learning.

Lea and Street's (1997, 2000) model of three perspectives, namely *study skills*, *academic socialisation*, and *academic literacies*, on student writing in higher education provides such a broader social perspective and enables us to examine assumptions and theories about the nature of language and language learning that underpin students' and lecturers' approaches to their learning and teaching. In this chapter, and the next, I will draw on Lea and Street's model, extending its analytical scope to spoken as well as written modes in which students formulate their learning and understanding. Lea and Street argue that *study skills* approaches to language learning and teaching assume that language can be taught in 'transparent' and 'transferable' units of language that learners acquire and apply in language learning tasks in the classroom and put to use outside the classroom whenever needed and appropriate. *Academic socialisation* approaches to learning



and studying assume that students are apprentices in certain fields or areas of study and that they are being socialised into using the specialised language and into understanding and using the concepts and theories that those fields are based on.

According to Lea and Street, *academic literacies* approaches to writing and studying are based on the assumption that learning and teaching are social practices. As such they are embedded in relationships of power between students and lecturers, not just through assessment processes but also through the processes in which teaching and learning are being organised and structured, and imbued with values and beliefs about the nature of knowledge and the nature of education and its outcomes. In *Student Writing and Staff Feedback in Higher Education: An Academic Literacies Approach* (2000), they clarify:

The academic literacies model [...] incorporates both of the other models into a more encompassing understanding of the nature of student writing within institutional practices, power relations and identities (2000, p.33).

Lea and Street explain:

An academic literacies approach views the institutions in which academic practices take place as constituted in, and as sites of, discourse and power. [...] This emphasis on identities and social meanings draws attention to deep affective and ideological conflicts. [...] A students' personal identity – Who am 'I'? – may be challenged by the form of writing required (Lea and Street, 2000, p.35).

From an *academic literacies* perspective then we can analyse layers of social meanings that could not be tapped from a study 'skills' or an academic 'socialisation' perspective. Lea and Steet's academic literacies analytic 'lens'

offers a framework for ‘making the connections’ between what Hymes (1996) called ‘the linguistic’ and ‘the social’ (see also chapter three, section eleven *Data analysis: Linking linguistic and social inquiry*).

From an *academic literacies* perspective, ‘the question of language’ that Linda has raised can be examined in broader social terms of multiple identity positions and relationships of power between students and lecturers. Recognising her and her fellow students’ identity positions as students who have ‘lots of questions about what is expected’ of them but also as professionals, ‘not students who are fresh from high school’, allows us to examine how and why ‘the question of language sometimes becomes an issue’ for them. Linda is aware that her confidence in her work ‘would depend on how the lecturer would see it’. In other words, Linda sees herself in a less powerful position than that of her lecturers. As Linda poignantly says: ‘So I feel that that has an effect too on *the way* we expect help’(my emphasis). The students do not just expect help; they expect that ‘the way’ they get help would take account of their sense of self as professionals. It appears that for the MA students, issues of ‘language’ and ‘help’ are indeed tied in with their identity positions as both students *and* professionals which impact on their expectations and perceptions.

## **2      Situating theory in the social context of practice**

*Now the problem is, we have not looked into [...] reconciling [...] communicative competence to what is designed for teachers, because we still don't have powers to design the curriculum, most of us, in our working situation.*

*Linda, 2nd interview, p.12*

The data analysis that this chapter reports will demonstrate that Lea and Street's perspectives of 'study skills', 'academic socialisation' and 'academic literacies' co-exist; they underpin in complex and overlapping ways students' and lecturers' interpretations of the learning and teaching practices they engage in and the knowledge and expertise they bring to their learning encounters. As suggested in chapter three (section two and three), students as research subjects are themselves actively involved in both the learning and the research process. While the students' own knowledge and expertise that they sometimes draw on in their essays, reports and dissertations might potentially contribute to the knowledge base of their academic disciplines, the papers they write for assignments are read by their tutors mainly for assessment purposes (Geisler, 1995). In this case study, however, the participant MA students shared their rich insights into the learning and teaching practices they have encountered and engaged in as teachers and as students not for purposes of assessment but to make a contribution to the construction of knowledge and understanding of language learning and teaching in educational contexts.

Focusing the analysis on notions of 'competence' (Dubin, 1989) and 'appropriateness' (Fairclough, 1992a) will help expose and examine some of the gaps in students' and lecturers' perceptions and understandings of what counts as 'competent', 'good' and 'appropriate' ways of speaking, writing, learning and teaching. Dubin (1989) stated in a paper entitled: *Situating Literacy Within Traditions of Communicative Competence*:

Rather than view communicative competence as an element apart from users, some researchers have expressed the need for studies which

describe the competencies required in particular settings in which literacy instruction takes place. Of course, these statements bring to mind the confusions around the word 'competence' [...]. At the same time, they underscore the need for ethnographically derived information as a data source for making decisions in language-in-education programmes (Dubin, 1989, p.177).

This study has met this 'need for ethnographically derived data', which Dubin and those researchers who view competence from a social or academic literacies perspective have stressed here, and given the participant MA students a 'platform' from which to share their perceptions and experience (see also chapter three). As Alison said:

I just felt that there were certain things that I thought I ought to raise regarding the running of this course, what I consider to be the problems, or where I consider the weaknesses to be, because I should say it hasn't been easy going through such a course, and because there was somebody who was doing such a study I just felt that will be some sort of a platform where maybe I could put across my ideas.

(Alison, 2nd interview, p.2)

Linda and I, towards the end of her second interview, also addressed the issue of the purpose of being interviewed in this particular way:

Linda: I regard this interview as not just an ordinary talk about everything that goes on in town, it's a specific thing. And I found it difficult to make a start of it without knowing the direction it's supposed to take, [...] so I didn't know, what was, whether what I was saying was relevant, or not, yes. I would just, maybe, I would have been comfortable, if I had known that the interview is going to be along this line, or this and that.

[...]



MH: Do you feel different now, [...] knowing what you know now about the way the interviews went, do you now get the feeling that there was a line in it? Do you now get the feeling that ...

Linda: There is a purpose.

MH: There was a purpose.

Linda: Yeah, I do have a feeling that there was a purpose, [...] and I think [...], at first, I thought I wouldn't have a direction in whatever I'm saying. When I look back now, I feel there is a particular direction that my speech has taken, and it has taken shape in a very, in a way that has not been planned, but I feel there is a purpose that has been achieved, and I'm quite happy about that.

(Linda, 2nd interview, p.19-20)

Working from this data base then, this study can make a contribution to the body of studies which Dubin feels need to 'describe the competencies required in particular settings in which literacy instruction takes place' by challenging theoretically simplistic and asocial notions of 'competence' and 'appropriateness' in language learning and teaching. In a *Postscript* to the special issue of 'Applied Linguistics' in which Dubin's paper appeared, Hymes (1989) highlighted Dubin's contribution to the debates: 'It is shrewd of Dubin to note that "literacy" has taken on much of the meaning intended for "competence"' (1989, p.246). Dubin (1989) argues:

Parallel with the term 'communicative competence', 'literacy' tends to mean different things to different people [...], particularly in the contrasts between views which see literacy as being separate from social contexts

and those which see it firmly embedded in them: in other words what Street (1984) calls 'ideological' and 'autonomous' views (1989, p.178).

As argued in chapter two (section three), the MA programmes at the centre of this case study appear to have not created a platform for the MA students to debate the theoretical and applied models of 'communicative competence' available to them. (See also chapter six, section six.) Linda explains:

I would have liked the course to offer me [...] more opportunities of being practical. And there are issues that we have discussed in the course, which are not easy to practise, which I would have wished to get more information about: how can this practice be put into practice, like for an example there is the question of [...] communicative competence, especially in situations where English is taught as a second language, or foreign language, teachers teach according to [...] the curriculum, that is designed by the government, or whoever. And if one is to come and talk about 'communicative competence', on issues that don't apply, or don't appear in the syllabus, maybe, the teaching would be seen as not going in line with what is the purpose of the teacher. Now the problem is, we have not looked into [...] reconciling [...] communicative competence to what is designed for teachers, because we still don't have powers to design the curriculum, most of us, in our working situation. So I would have wished the course to come up with some ideas of reconciliation between [...] this theory of communicative style and the practice of syllabus [...] that has to be taught in the classroom. There have been quite a number of issues, that I have felt, they are good in theory but how can they be put into practice, given the situation that we work in.

(Linda, 2nd interview, p.12)

Linda here associates her concern about 'reconciling communicative competence to what is designed for teachers' with a concern about the curriculum 'that is

designed by the government, or whoever' and pedagogy or, in her words, the 'purpose of the teacher'. It seems that Linda, who would have 'wished the course to come up with some ideas of reconciliation between [...] this theory of communicative style and the practice of syllabus', is in line with Dubin's observation that

there has been a shift away from an agenda for finding out what is happening in a community regarding language use to a set of statements about what an idealized curriculum for L2 learning/acquisition should entail, a shift away from *how* people in a particular culture use language to *what* elements comprise communicative behavior (Dubin, 1989, p.174; her emphasis).

Linda, who is concerned that teachers in the classroom 'still don't have powers to design the curriculum', is disappointed that on her MA course there was no space created to debate the tension or struggle between the Discourses of 'the *theory* of communicative style and the *practice* of syllabus' (my emphasis). She is aware that such tensions do not exist in a 'neutral' or 'idealised' teaching context but would need to be 'reconciled' in her 'particular situation'. Linda's notion of 'reconciliation' then is embedded in notions of context and Discourse (see chapter two, section one). She firmly situates issues that she feels 'are good in theory' in the social context of how they can 'be put into practice, given the situation that we work in'. She explains further:

Linda: I'm aware that it's not everything that we learn about that can work [...], I think in most cases we tend to look at getting things in the accurate way, we plan and want them to be done exactly in the same way as they are planned, without looking at some of the factors which might make things not work. [...]

MH: Were you able to do this in the class, were you able [...] to bring this into the discussion?

Linda: I was, but the disappointing fact is that we, even if I did that, there was no follow-up on what could be done in that particular situation, things were just left suspended, which I didn't really feel satisfied about.  
(Linda, 2interview, p.12-13)

Linda, it seems, does *not* subscribe to the 'autonomous' perspective of applying what could be seen as 'the accurate way' of teaching in a 'communicative style' in the classroom or, in Dubin's terms, 'one which views a subject, in this case literacy, as culturally neutral or as existing apart from society' (Dubin, 1989, p.179). Linda is aware that 'not everything' taught or learnt on the MA course 'can work' precisely because the teaching of literacy or indeed 'communicative competence' needs to take account of 'the factors which might make things not work'. Thus, she would have liked to see the link between classroom practices and 'something broader of a cultural and social kind' (Street, 2000, p.21; see also chapter three, section three) be problematised and debated on her MA course. Linda then appears to take an 'ideological' perspective on her teaching and on her role and 'purpose' as a teacher, viewing her subject of language teaching and learning as 'highly sensitive to cultural contexts' (Dubin, 1989, p.179).

As has been established in chapter two, section one, this study is based on the assumption that language is historically and socially embedded in discourses and literacy practices. Such an assumption makes it possible to discuss the issues of a social and historical nature that Linda felt were 'just left suspended': 'There was no follow-up on what could be done in this particular situation, things were just



left suspended, which I didn't really feel satisfied about'. Pennycook advocates an 'understanding of how discourses map out our different worlds' (Pennycook, 1994, p.131). He elaborates:

Language teaching becomes a process of making the familiar unfamiliar, of linking the process of learning a second language to a pedagogy that seeks to question how we come to understand ourselves as we do. One immediate implication of this is in terms of language teaching curricula. The search for 'content' in language teaching has always been a contentious one, whether in terms of formal study of language as content, or the functionalist or pragmatist orientations of communicative language learning or language learning for specific purposes (Pennycook, 1994. P.132).

It can be argued then that the complex issues that Linda felt 'were left suspended' can be addressed from a theoretical vantage point that links more narrowly defined issues of 'communicative competence' or a 'communicative style' of teaching and learning to broader social understandings of 'how discourses map out our different worlds' (see also Gee's notion of Discourse with a capital 'D' discussed above). Linda presents herself as one of the teachers who, as she says, 'tend to look at getting things in the accurate way, we plan and want them to be done exactly in the same way as they are planned, without looking at some of the factors which might make things not work'. Her wanting a 'follow-up on what could be done' seems to resonate with Pennycook's line of argument for 'a pedagogy that seeks to question how we come to understand' our teaching practices. His purpose in *making the familiar unfamiliar* echoes the PhD student's account of the anthropologist's concern to 'go one step further in trying to understand why they do it in the way they do it (in Parry, Atkinson and Delamont, 1994; see chapter one, section three)'. Thus, rather than analysing language teaching based on an assumed 'accurate way' of doing it, teachers can make the

‘familiar’ syllabus as taught in the classroom ‘unfamiliar’ as they examine different syllabi and unpack the theoretical models that underpin such frameworks for teaching.

Making the familiar unfamiliar then could offer a tool for teachers/MA students to self-reflexively and critically examine pedagogical and social concerns such as the one expressed by Linda about the link between the *theory* of ‘communicative style’ and the *practice* of ‘syllabus’. Linda is particularly concerned about putting concepts such as ‘communicative competence’ on the agenda in her classroom, concepts which ‘don’t appear in the syllabus’ and could ‘be seen as not going in line with what is the purpose of the teacher’. It appears that the MA students in this case study were not offered the opportunity to discuss such broader social and pedagogical concerns which have been raised in similar ways by Peirce (1989):

How might the understanding of English as discourse affect the teaching of English internationally? I would argue that the teaching of English for communicative competence is in itself inadequate as a language-teaching goal if English teachers are interested in exploring how language shapes the subjectivities of their students and how it is implicated in power and dominance (1989, p.406).

Linda is concerned about the practical and social implications of concepts such as ‘communicative competence’ for her students’ learning of English as a second (or third) language in the classroom and for her role as a teacher. It appears that some of the analytical concepts made available to her on her Master’s course such as ‘competence’ are deeply embedded in Chomsky’s asocial notion of ‘competence’ of an idealised speaker and ‘performance’ which, as has been shown in this section, are constraining and unhelpful ‘if English teachers are interested in

exploring how language shapes the subjectivities of their students and how it is implicated in power and dominance'. (For further analysis and discussion of un/available analytical concepts and approaches see also chapter six *Student voice in university classrooms – un/available discourses and narratives.*)

### 3 Gaps in expectations and understanding

*I would have been in a lecture, and a tutor would have said something, or a British student would have said something, and it would just not strike a cord with me somehow.*

*Blanche, 2nd, p.5*

As discussed in previous chapters (see chapter one, section five *Researcher and research participants*; see also chapter three, section two *Taking an ethnographic perspective* and section three '*Access*'), the participant MA students are teachers of English as a second or foreign language who have undergone their professional studies in fields such as English language teaching, applied linguistics and related fields of academic knowledge. It became apparent when being interviewed, that the participant MA students had derived their understanding of theoretical and practical issues in language teaching and learning not only from established theories in those 'expert' academic fields but also from their own expertise as *professionals* in these fields. It also became clear that some of those insights might have clashed with their experience as *students* on the MA courses but also with views and perspectives held by their lecturers or fellow MA students. For example, Blanche, who prior to enrolling on her Master's programme was a teacher of English as a second language in North America (see Appendix 3.2: *List*



of participant MA students), refers to how her views of English language teaching appear to be different from the views that other MA students hold:

Maybe among my British colleagues, a lot of them either work for the British Council or a similar language teaching service overseas, that's their background, so for them English language teaching is not what it is to me, and [...] they have a right to have their own ideas about English language teaching, and I can't say [...] ESL is this or is that, but [...] I would have been in a lecture, and a tutor would have said something, or a British student would have said something, and it would just not strike a cord with me somehow, it's really hard to explain precisely what I mean but I would think 'wow, I never would have said it that way, or I never would have thought it that way'.

(Blanche 2nd, pp.4-5)

Blanche, here, gives an example of how the multiple realities and differences in 'background' that both students and lecturers bring to their MA programmes generate social and cultural meanings and interpretations of what goes on 'in *the* field' of English language teaching. It appears that what 'English language teaching' is for Blanche is not necessarily what it is for some of her peers or her tutors. Blanche's comment demonstrates that such discrepancies in interpretations remain largely hidden and that questions about what exactly is meant, or what exactly is intended in using a particular term or concept are rarely asked. As a result, there appears to be little awareness of such differences and both students and lecturers seem to assume that the meaning(s) of 'English language teaching' or indeed the meaning of concepts such as 'language' or 'competence' are shared. Blanche's comment appears to be in line with Linda's observation, see previous section, that even when she felt she had been able to share in class her concern



about the tension between some theoretical concepts and their practical significance for her teaching context there was no ‘follow-up’. In other words, according to Blanche and Linda and other MA students, as the analysis will show, such *gaps* in expectations and understanding were rarely being explored and opened up for discussion even when students made it known in class discussions that they found a concept or a term problematic. Thus, while going successfully through their MA programmes, some students may not get what they had expected to take away. In Linda’s words:

So I have a feeling that some of the things were just left suspended and the problems, I had on other issues, or certain issues in language teaching are still there, even now, even though I completed the course.

(Linda, 2nd interview, p.13)

As the analysis so far in this chapter suggests, there appears to be a relationship between students’ views of language and language teaching and the expectations of what they should be achieving on their courses. In other words, the views that individual students and institutions have about language constrain and limit, or enhance and extend, the learning that is going on. This argument appears to be in line with Geisler (1995) who contends:

Writing does, indeed, require some learning – when learning is characterized as an *acquaintance* with a set of cultural facts and values. Without this kind of learning, writing fails, or it is only over the bridge of common facts and values that rhetorical action can be taken. However, writing also is at odds with learning – when learning is characterized as the *acceptance* of a web of cultural knowledge. With this second kind of learning, writing inevitably fails, for passive acceptance of cultural facts and values precludes the rhetorical agency that motivates us to pick up the pen (or turn on the computer) in the first place (Geisler, 1995, p.116).

As discussed in section two above, this study extends Lea and Street's three perspectives of writing in higher education to speaking and learning. Here too, Geisler's assertion about the relationship between writing and learning is extended to include not just written but also oral modes of verbal expression. Students then, expressing themselves in writing for assignments or speaking in class discussions, lectures or tutorials, may not 'learn' what they expect to learn if learning embodies 'passive acceptance of cultural facts and values' which inhibit, if not prevent, what Geisler defines as 'the rhetorical agency that motivates us to pick up the pen' or open our mouth in the first place. (For further discussion see chapter five, section six *Students developing rhetorical agency*.) Geisler (1995, p.116) summarises her argument:

We write, in other words, both to contribute and to counter the current trajectory of our culture.

If the goal in education is for students to learn about and understand 'sets of cultural facts and values (Geisler, 1995, p.116)' then, as this chapter argues, key concepts in English language teaching and, crucially, the assumptions underlying those concepts need to be made explicit for the MA students to achieve that goal so they are in a position to 'contribute and to counter the current trajectory of (their) culture (Geisler, 1995, p.116)' or professional field. In sections four to six below Lea and Street's three models of student writing, as explicated in section one above, will be employed in order to illuminate connections between some of the expectations that MA students bring to their courses and the often hidden and unexplored assumptions that underpin key concepts in their field such as notions of 'competence' and 'appropriateness'.

#### 4 Autonomous and ideological concepts of language ‘competence’ and ‘appropriateness’

*If they maybe come across a situation where somebody makes a grammatical error, they wouldn't maybe think that it's a way of totally disregarding that person as somebody who is not qualified to be on a course such as this.*

*Alison, 2nd interview, p.2*

Being an MA student prior to undertaking this study, I had observed that some students were silent while others were talking a lot in their MA classes. I had also observed that students, like myself before, were trying to get their point across in what they felt was an ‘appropriate’ time and ‘the appropriate way’. The students’ anxiety and preoccupation with trying to make a point ‘accurately’ and in an appropriate time and way often, as I knew from my own experience, resulted in not saying anything and not making any point at all. It appears that taking such a rather narrow and technical approach to deciding how and what to say in class is linked to concepts of language that foster certain expectations of a speaker’s communicative competence. Such narrowly defined notions of what it means to be able to make a ‘competent’ contribution in a learning environment cannot, it seems, promote and encourage Geisler’s (1995) expectation of ‘rhetorical agency’ as discussed above. Dubin’s (1989) insight is helpful here:

Over time, the use of the term ‘competence’ has taken on a range of meanings, embodying both societal and individual dimensions: in educational psychology literature it means ‘knowledge and skills’; in the dictionary it means ‘ability’, and within the world of competence-based education it is equated with ‘performance’ (Dubin, 1989, p.172).



Students then who are focused on how their English language competence or ‘performance’ will be judged might not get to actually *making their point* as they are anxious about their skills. Lea and Street (1997) suggest that the *study skills* approach to student writing and, by extension, to student speaking is based on a model of language that emphasises grammar and spelling and breaks language learning and language use into sets of oral and written skills that need to be mastered. In other words, it is based on Chomsky’s assumption that all individual speakers acquire and use language in the same way. (For a discussion of Chomsky’s notions of ‘competence’ and ‘performance’ see chapter two, section three.) However, according to Street (1984) and, as Dubin (1989, p.179) asserts, ‘those who claim that literacy is acquired and used the same way by all individuals represent an autonomous view’. (See also discussion in section two above.) Such an ‘autonomous’ view of language and literacy gears language teaching towards the goal of students acquiring the varieties of linguistic and communicative competence they need to speak or write the ‘right’ way. Consequently, students who do not get ‘right’ what they want to say in class or who do not get their essays ‘right’ get constructed as having a language *deficit*. (For a discussion of perceptions of language ‘deficits’ see also discussion in chapter one, section two.) In other words, students who delay before they speak in order to think about how they are going to say what they want to say frequently construct themselves, or get constructed, as being linguistically not competent (enough) with reference to what is judged to be the norm. However, as seen above, Dubin (1989) suggests that communicative competence has come to have multiple meanings, and that such a narrow ‘autonomous’ view contrasts with a broader



social or 'ideological' (Street, 1984) perspective on communicative competence.

In her second interview, Alison observed:

Then maybe if they maybe come across a situation where somebody makes a grammatical error, they wouldn't maybe think that it's a way of totally disregarding that person as somebody who is not qualified to be on a course such as this, but just see it like something that can happen to anybody, because even people who are native speakers, they have their own weaknesses, and I think when it comes to maybe writing, you realize that there can be second language speakers who can write better than native speakers.

(Alison, 2nd interview, pp.2-3)

At first sight, Alison here expresses a skills-based view of students' competence in writing: writing is seen as a skill that some students master better than others. At the same time, however, she observes and disapproves of the fact that the overall qualification of somebody on a Master's course is being questioned by some students on such a skills-based assessment of a situation 'where somebody makes a grammatical error'. It appears that Alison is adopting an 'ideological' rather than 'autonomous' view of students' capabilities and communicative competence, linking linguistic considerations with a broader social perspective. In her view, communicative competence is not about students acquiring single autonomous elements of linguistic and communicative competence but about students being competent to pursue and communicate their learning. Difference, then, in the ways we speak, write and understand can be seen as a resource in learning and teaching which can generate thought and reflection on common classroom practices and challenge simplistic assumptions about the nature of language 'competence' and 'appropriateness'.

It follows from this discussion that language in general and English in particular is embedded in social, cultural and institutional practices and cannot, therefore, be seen as 'neutral', 'innocent' or 'transparent'. Responding to a line of questions about how she perceives somebody who speaks English when it's not their first language and what their English should be like, drawing on her background as an ESL (English as a Second Language) teacher in North America, Blanche said:

Blanche: [...] Their English should be fluent enough so that other people understand them, and so that they understand other people who use the language, so that they can do the academic work that they have to do at school [...] not perfectly necessarily but, I know that's kind of subjective, but correct enough so that it doesn't interfere with people's understanding, and it's constantly improving, that's what I would say.

MH: Would you think that is also true for the classes here?

Blanche: Well, I have a Taiwanese friend here who got upset because one tutor told her that she needed to improve her English on a lot of her coursework, and that really upset her when that was said, and so according to what she said I guess at least among some tutors there isn't enough sympathy for the abilities of non-native speakers, they give lip-service to them but maybe in reality they don't respect them enough.

(Blanche, 2nd interview, p.8)

Blanche's observation, based on what her Taiwanese friend had said to her, that 'there isn't enough sympathy for the abilities of non-native speakers' resonates with Alison's comment above which challenges the notion that 'where somebody makes a grammatical error [...] that it's a way of totally disregarding that person as

somebody who is not qualified to be on a course such as this'. Fairclough's (1992a) discussion of *The appropriacy of 'appropriateness'* provides a helpful analysis of the gatekeeping function of language and the relationships of power that underpin the norms such as grammatical norms or conventions of academic writing that learners of English are expected to comply with. Drawing on Hymes, Fairclough (1992a) writes:

'Appropriateness' belongs to the domain of language attitudes: it is one sort of *judgement* that is made by members of speech communities about language use (Hymes, 1972). [...] It is common to find linguists writing about what 'is appropriate' in a speech community rather than what is 'judged to be appropriate' (by particular groups) (Fairclough, 1992a, p.52; my emphasis).

Fairclough's concern about linguists writing about what 'is appropriate' rather than what is 'judged to be appropriate' is in line with Street's (1984) analysis of 'autonomous' and 'ideological' models of language and literacy. Reified views on *what is appropriate* then would appear to be underpinned by the 'autonomous' model, while concerns about *what is judged to be appropriate* would appear to be embedded in the 'ideological' model which offers a framework for linking 'the linguistic with the social'. As Fairclough (1992a) asserts, 'the normative and prescriptive nature of the concept of appropriateness becomes particularly clear in discussions of *inappropriateness*' (1992, p.36, his emphasis). Students like Blanche's Taiwanese friend then would benefit from debates of notions of 'appropriateness' within such broader analytic framework that can take account of the different hierarchical positions of power and authority within which such normative judgements are being located.



Lea and Street's (1997, 2000) account of the *academic socialisation* perspective can usefully be applied here to analyse and help interpret and better understand some of the participant MA students' experiences and expectations. Students who take an *academic socialisation* perspective want to learn the 'appropriate' standards, norms and conventions of their academic fields. In the *academic socialisation* model, 'access' is a key notion as students want to understand criteria such as 'originality of thought', 'synthesis of views', 'reference to relevant literature' and 'argument' which are commonly used in British higher education contexts to categorise what is expected of student coursework and to judge student work as excellent and 'appropriate'. Academic practices are thus seen to be homogenous and transparent which can be learned through processes of socialisation and acculturation. For example, Harry referred in his second interview to the unease of a fellow student when she realised that, when she did contribute something, people were not paying any attention to what she was saying:

Harry: And also someone else who was so long winded in what they said, you know, they may have had something to say, but it's just so long winded that people sort of rejected what they were saying without reason.

MH: This, for instance, is something that I wanted to ask you about things that occasionally happen, as you said, that foreign students who are prepared to contribute then sort of 'miss the mark'. (Hmm.) What is it that's going on then?

Harry: What's going on, ehm, I suppose, again, it's a cultural thing and [...] if you have an English native speaker lecturer, a male white lecturer, and I'm a male white English speaking teacher, [...], we share a lot more, and



we have both been to English universities, and we've both sort of been in English language teaching, so we know, you know, [...] There is just some expectation of what to contribute, how to contribute. [...] If somebody comes from outside that, has to learn that, I think. So, maybe, before they have learned it, it's possible that [...], you know, the person seems to be missing the point.

(Harry, 2nd interview, pp.6-7)

While Harry as a 'male white English speaking teacher' and an 'English native speaker lecturer, a male white lecturer' will be familiar with and share the English academic culture, those who prior to their MA course have not been to English universities may occasionally be 'missing the point' as there seems to be some 'expectation of what to contribute, how to contribute'. It is clear to Harry that if 'somebody comes from outside that, has to learn that'. To Harry it is a 'cultural *thing*' and, if somebody wants to gain access to its expectations and norms, can be socialised into conventions. Harry appears to construct the English academic culture as homogenous and as having fixed rules that students need to learn if they want to belong to this academic community. He explains that the expectations of 'what to contribute, how to contribute' are familiar and therefore 'natural' to some groups of students, in particular the subgroup of male white English students. Arguably, as Harry suggested, those who have already been in contact with the categories and norms of – in the context of this study - the academic culture of studying in a British university may find it less of a challenge to be socialised into the conventions of academic writing or classroom discussion. Students like Harry share those norms with most of their lecturers. However, they may fail to recognise that 'if somebody comes from outside that, (and) has to learn that', thus albeit implicitly, such cultural practices are not at all neutral or natural. In chapter

five, this analysis will be taken further to discuss different and contested notions of the concept of ‘contribution’ in the university.

## 5 The verbal and fluid nature of culture

*When I'm in a class, [...] and I'm contributing, that isn't really me, I don't, I sort of almost feel that I switch into another way of being.*  
*Harry, 2nd interview, p.11*

In contrast to viewing culture as a ‘thing’, Street (1993) asserts that ‘culture is a verb’, that is ‘an active process of meaning making and contest over definition, including its own definition’ (1993, p.25). It is argued here then that viewing culture as verbal and fluid in nature rather than fixed and static means that those who participate in the cultural practices of a community are actively involved in creating and reinforcing but also in challenging the definitions, categories, norms and expectations they live by. In his second interview I asked Harry whether it had happened to him that people were not paying attention when *he* was making a contribution in class. Harry talks in particular about contributing in class through work in groups but also in whole class discussions:

Harry: Hmm, yeah, certainly, I mean, I have said things which I have realized I have missed the point completely. [...]

MH: How did you feel?

Harry: (INAUDIBLE), irritated, frustrated, and then after a while, no, in the small group I felt irritated, frustrated, and then I just don't want to be bothered, go on with the group work [...]. In the whole class you feel, you feel embarrassed, you know, it's different there, because you are not going

to, it's much less of a dialogue in class, you think you are making your point, and then sometimes your point might hit the spot, and sometimes it's not.

(Harry, 2nd interview, pp.7-8)

It seems that Harry as a 'male white English speaking teacher' who has been to English universities does not get it 'right' all the time and also does not necessarily feel at ease. As his comments show, he feels 'irritated, frustrated' in the small group and 'embarrassed' in the whole class when 'it's much less of a dialogue'. Speaking here about *his* contributions in class, his observation that 'sometimes your point might hit the spot, and sometimes it's not' seems rather similar to his comment above (section four) about some of his fellow students who, at times when they try to contribute, may be 'missing the point'. This is particularly significant in the light of his comment above in relation to the cultural expectations in an English university: 'If somebody comes from outside that, has to learn that'. Being familiar with the English academic culture, having 'been to English universities, and [...] in English language teaching', he too appears to feel 'outside that' at times (see also section six below). The following extracts from Harry's second interview can further this discussion as they show that he views his way of contributing in class quite differently from his writing on the MA course. He states:

The switching into academic mode in writing, I find it quite natural to do.  
(Harry, 2nd interview, p.10)

In writing, Harry appears to 'switch into academic mode' with ease and confidence. As discussed above, he has been inculcated into the ways of essay

writing in English schools and universities and therefore they feel ‘quite natural’ to him. As an insider, he can be in control of his writing and he feels at home with the criteria and expectations in writing. In speaking, however, he seems to feel that he has very little or no control:

When I'm in a class, [...] and I'm contributing, that isn't really me, I don't, I sort of almost feel that I switch into another way of being.  
(Harry, 2nd interview, p.11)

As discussed in section one, ‘a student’s personal identity [...] may be challenged by the form of writing required (Lea and Street, 2000, p.35)’ but also, as Harry here demonstrates, by the form of *speaking* required. As the analytical task here is to take account of the wider social and institutional processes that contribute to Harry’s feeling ‘that isn’t really me’, when he is contributing in class, we need to go beyond notions of academic ‘socialisation’ and ‘inculcation’. Ivanič (1998), who emphasised ‘the dangers of thinking about entering the academic discourse community as a process of initiation into powerful discourses (1998, p.106)’, suggested instead that ‘there is always tension and struggle at the interface between the institution and its members (1998, p.106)’. The concept of Discourses, with a capital ‘D’ (Gee, 1996) is helpful here, as language use in (and outside) classrooms is embedded in Discourses (see also chapter one), which Gee views as ‘a sort of identity kit which comes complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk, and often write, so as to take on a particular social role that others will recognize’ (Gee, 1996, p.127; see also chapter one, section five). While Harry has access to the ‘identity kit’ of MA students when it comes to writing, he appears not to know how to access it when



it comes to speaking in class. As discussed above, he feels ‘irritated’ and ‘frustrated’ in group work and ‘embarrassed’ in the whole class. Harry appears not to have the complete ‘identity kit’ and, despite being an insider to English higher education norms and expectations, he feels that he *cannot* be himself. The important point here is that such issues of identity, when students feel they have to ‘switch into another mode of *being*’ (my emphasis), cannot be addressed from an academic ‘socialisation’ perspective, which theorises academic writing (and speaking) through notions of access to ‘transparent’ and neutral academic codes and conventions. The analysis here then has employed analytical tools that are located in a social practice approach to writing and, by extension in the context of this case study, to speaking in higher education classrooms and enable us to make the connection between issues of language use and conventions of classroom interaction with issues of identity and relationships of power within wider institutional contexts. Discourses with their ‘identity kits’ and ‘instructions on how to act, talk, and often write’ create norms and procedures and categories, which help guard the gates and regulate those instructions. This analysis will be taken further in the concluding section of this chapter.

## **6 Language as a site of struggle over meaning, access and power**

*You end up telling yourself that every time I have to say something no notice is taken of what I have to say, or people can afford to just say 'yes' and that is it.*

*Alison, 2nd interview, p.10*

As the analysis in the previous sections has demonstrated that students who ‘come from outside’ may not be heard, even, in Harry’s words, ‘if they may have had

something to say'. Students, it seems, struggle over access to academic norms and conventions which are often perceived to be neutral and 'transparent'. However, the discussion above has also shown that students like Harry, who share some of the expectations of how to write and act in English higher education with their lecturers, may still find it difficult to demystify some of the rules in university classrooms. This analysis ties in with Lillis (1999) who argued that

whilst the view prevails that such conventions are unproblematic and simply 'common sense', [...] confusion is so all pervasive a dimension of (the experience of) students in higher education that it points to an *institutional practice of mystery* (1999, p.127; her emphasis).

While it appears then that Harry has corroborated and internalised the norms and expectations of academic writing on his MA course, he is quite unsure of the conventions of speaking in his MA classes thus demonstrating that some institutional practices may remain mysterious and confusing even to the 'insider' groups of male white English students. This confusion over institutional practices can be unpacked through the analytical lens of an *academic literacies* approach to learning in higher education which asserts that academic writing and speaking are embedded in Discourses, in Gee's and Foucault's terms (see chapter two) and bound up with issues of identity, and power relations within the hierarchical structures of classrooms. As discussed in chapter two, Discourses are constitutive and reproductive of social and institutional practices, identities and social relationships as well as being shaped by those engaging in those practices.

Drawing on Foucault, Benesch (2001) writes:

power is 'always already there' (Foucault, 1980, p.141); one can never be outside its domain. In contemporary life, power is not a thing possessed by

some at the expense of others but, rather [*sic*] a function of ‘the strategies, the networks, the mechanisms, all those techniques by which a decision is accepted and why which that decision could not but be taken in the way it was’ (Foucault, 1988, p.104). Studying power, then is not a matter of identifying heads of state or administrators but, rather, of asking questions about how and why decisions are made: ‘Who makes decisions for me? Who is preventing me from doing this and telling me to do that? Who is programming my movements and activities? [...]’ (Foucault, 1988, p.103). Though Foucault begins these questions with ‘who’, he is more interested in ‘how’ and ‘why,’ the mechanisms of power, how it works strategically (Benesch, 2001, p.54).

Benesch’s approach to ‘studying power’ is helpful here as it enables us to put Harry’s unease about contributing in his classrooms into its wider institutional context and thus address questions such as *how* and *why* do MA students participate in class, *how* and *why* are decisions taken about what is expected from them in whole class or group discussions, *how* and *why* might students like Harry feel they have to ‘switch into another way of being’ when they try to meet those expectations. Such questions provide analytical tools that can help us recognise that classrooms in educational institutions are sites where students and lecturers construct identities that are embedded in the discourses of the classroom (see also chapter six). What is *judged* to be ‘appropriate’ in the particular context of an MA classroom is based on shared cultural and institutional understandings and, as discussed in section four above, such judgements underpin the gatekeeping and regulatory function of language and academic conventions in classroom settings. Harry, who shares some of those underlying expectations and judgements with regard to academic writing, appears to feel left out in class as he feels he cannot fully contribute and be himself. Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz assert (see also chapter three, section one) that ‘the participant structure of such events thus reflects a real power asymmetry underneath the surface equality, a serious problem when the lesser communicator does not know the rules (Gumperz and



Cook-Gumperz, 1982, p.9; see also chapter three)'. When 'switching into academic mode in writing', Harry appears to locate himself on the same level of power and authority with his white male English lecturers. When contributing in class, however, when he feels 'that isn't really me', he appears to feel, in their terms, the 'power asymmetry underneath the surface equality' between himself and his lecturers, a loss of his sense of self as he may well see himself as 'the lesser communicator'. This analysis of *how* and *why* MA students like Harry may suddenly feel they do *not* know the rules ties in again with Gee's notion of Discourse as a 'socially accepted association among ways of using language [...] that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group (1996, p.131)'. Harry seems to experience such a sense of loss of membership and belonging as he appears to feel excluded from the Discourses and institutional practices in MA classrooms in an English university.

The following interview extract can further develop the argument that has been made here that institutional practices open and close gates for students' involvement with the knowledge and practices of their academic fields. Alison refers to a situation in one of her classes when she tried to raise an issue related to language not being a neutral medium in language teaching:

I was talking about the fact that in our universities we use English to teach Setswana, you know, I was expecting us to maybe explore the topic more, I mean such that I get a balanced idea of maybe the argument for that, you know [...], and if it's something like that maybe somebody could have given me a point of view that would make me appreciate the situation as it



is, or maybe we could have sort of debated it as a class, and maybe come up with something sound out of it.

(Alison, 2nd interview, p10-11)

It appears that with her question about the use of English to teach Setswana in universities in her home country Alison was trying to put something up for discussion that had not been on the lecturer's agenda. The issue Alison was raising would have expanded on the topic of the lecture, thereby putting something on the agenda about the impact and the implications that the use of English to teach Setswana has on the students and teachers and how and what they learn. Alison was hoping to be able to 'come up with something sound out of it'. Alison's question raises issues about the role of language, here specifically the role of English, in education and society. Here again an *academic literacies* perspective offers a lens through which such broader issues 'of a social kind' can be analysed and debated. Peirce's (1989) argument, it seems, is useful in addressing the issue that Alison raised about the role of English in Botswana. Peirce states: 'English, like all other languages, is [...] a site of struggle over meaning, access, and power. This struggle takes on different forms in different societies, communities, and organizations' (1989, p.405). She elaborates her point citing Ndebele (1987) who 'commenting on the future role of English in South Africa' writes:

I think we should not be critically complacent about the role and future of English in South Africa, for there are many reasons why it cannot be considered an innocent language. The problems of society will also be the problems of the predominant language in that society. It is the carrier of its perceptions, its attitudes, and its goals, for through it, the speakers absorb entrenched attitudes. The guilt of English must then be recognized and appreciated before its continued use can be advocated (Ndebele cited in Peirce, 1989, p.406).

The points made here by both Peirce and Ndebele about language in society as ‘carrier of its perceptions, its attitudes, and its goals’ are grounded in views of language as socially and historically embedded which are underpinned by discourses of power and dominance. If such a perspective had been offered to Alison and her peers, ‘maybe (they) could have sort of debated it as a class, and maybe come up with something sound out of it’.

Yet, like Harry, Alison did not get what she wanted; she wanted her question to be explored, to be taken further; she wanted an opportunity to get to know different points of view and *where they were coming from*. It appears that Alison wanted to find out about different ways of understanding and interpreting the issue she had raised. Instead the lecture went on. Alison said in her interview about this incident:

You end up telling yourself that every time I have to say something no notice is taken of what I have to say, or people can afford to just say 'yes' and that is it.

(Alison, 2nd interview, p.10)

The lecturer who did not open up her agenda to Alison’s question but instead went on delivering *her* agenda to the students, making use of her social authority and institutional power, ignored the weight and significance of Alison’s question in *Alison’s* learning agenda. This issue will be taken up in chapter six (section two), where the analysis will focus on some of the students’ concern about their self-development on their MA course. Alison’s agenda thus would be more in

keeping with Street's (1996) position than with the lecturer's in this case. Street argued that the issue of how power can be transformed

involves a transformation from the disciplinary and coercive forms it has taken on in modern society, so that it works instead in a positive way to bring out human potential and to harness creative energy (Street, 1996, p.13)

When students have their experience and their questions not taken up, when institutional knowledge is being privileged over students' knowledge, students may have a sense of being 'deprofessionalised' as Ivanič (1998) found in her study of mature students. What is at stake for students is their self, their self as professionals, who want to bring into the debate what they know and to take away some broader view to reflect on. Students who perceive their experience as not being valued might resign from the game rather than engage in and transform their learning as active participants.

The analysis in this chapter has helped make the connections between language concerns raised by the participant MA students such as Linda doubting her language competence with social concerns such as the practical and social implications of teachers putting 'communicative competence' on the teaching agenda when they 'still don't have powers to design the curriculum' (Linda).

Drawing on Lea and Street's three models of student writing, expanding it to include speaking, and Gee's notion of discourse with a capital 'D', the chapter has demonstrated ways in which learning encounters and interactions are implicated in relationships of authority and language dominance within which, as Pierce

(1989) says, ‘participants take up different subject positions, positions that are constituted by language’. (For further discussion see chapter six *Student voice in university classrooms – un/available discourses and narratives.*)

Data analysis in chapter five ‘*Contribution*’ – *a contested practice in the university* will make further use of Lea and Street’s three perspectives of *study skills, academic socialisation* and *academic literacies* but also of Gee’s (1996) notion of ‘socially contested terms’ and Street’s (2000) notion of ‘literacy practices’. The analysis will focus on the literacy practice of ‘contribution’ in student learning, arguing that students’ knowledge and insights need to be taken seriously as contributions to their own and others’ learning. The chapter will suggest a shift away from concepts of ‘competence’ and ‘appropriateness’ in language learning and teaching towards concepts of ‘contribution’ to meaning making and towards understanding learning as a social practice.



## CHAPTER 5

### ‘CONTRIBUTION’ – A CONTESTED PRACTICE IN THE UNIVERSITY

**Teaching, like language, is not a neutral practice. Teachers, whether consciously or not, help to organize the way students perceive themselves and the world.**

**Peirce, 1989, p.408**

**Much as we are students, we are teachers.**

**Linda, Focus group discussion,  
p.22**

#### **1 Contested terms in institutional and epistemological contexts**

*The way that terms are used here are not the way that similar terms will be used in my background.*

*Blanche, 2nd interview, p.3*

As in chapter four *Gaps in perceptions of ‘appropriateness’ and language ‘competence’*, data analysis in this chapter draws on Lea and Street’s (1997, 2000) model of three perspectives on student writing as an analytic lens that helps interpret and understand ‘what goes on’ in the teaching and learning on MA programmes in ELT and TESOL, as perceived by the MA students who have contributed to this study their insights as students, learners, but also as professionals, teachers, in this field. As discussed in chapter three (section eleven), this study connects linguistic and social analytic tools in order to illuminate the data and develop a deeper understanding of the linguistic and pedagogic practices that the MA students encountered on their Master’s programme. The analysis and discussion of interview and focus group data in chapter four challenged notions of

‘competence’ (Dubin, 1989) and ‘appropriateness’ (Fairclough, 1992a) in language and language learning and teaching which are based on ‘autonomous’ rather than ‘ideological’ (Street, 1984) models of language and literacy. Chapter five builds on this analysis and develops it further, honing in on the concept of ‘contribution’ in the university as a contested term and practice. The epistemological and methodological assumptions, as discussed in chapter two and three, about the contested nature of language and its embeddedness in discourses and literacy practices provide the analytical tools for data analysis to take account of some of the complex links between language learning and teaching and the ‘background’ that students (and teachers) bring to it. Being underpinned by those assumptions, the analysis in chapter five is framed by Gee’s notion of ‘socially contested terms’ (Gee, 1996, p.15) and by Street’s (2000) notion of ‘literacy practices’.

Chapter four argued, drawing on Lea and Street’s (1997, 2000) three models of student writing and learning in higher education, that notions of ‘competence’ and ‘appropriateness’ if conceptualised in terms of *skills* or *socialisation* views of language and learning hinder the students’ active engagement in their learning and may make them ‘resign from the game’ rather than transform it. The discussion helped expose and illuminate some of the gaps in students’ and lecturers’ perceptions and understandings of what count as ‘good’, ‘competent’ and ‘appropriate’ ways of speaking, writing, teaching, learning and of being an MA student. As discussed in chapter four, *study skills* approaches to learning assume that writing, speaking, listening, and reading build on a technical understanding of grammar, spelling, rhetoric and can lead to ‘a situation where somebody makes a

grammatical error' and negative judgements of people who may make such errors, 'totally disregarding that person as somebody who is not qualified to be on a course such as this' (Alison; see chapter four).

*Academic socialisation* approaches, on the other hand, assume that the institutions, academic disciplines and disciplinary fields in which academic practices take place are homogenous and monolithic entities with transparent sets of rules and criteria that students, who are seen as 'apprentices', need to learn if they want to gain access to the knowledge of their chosen disciplines and fields and become an 'expert' themselves. *Academic literacies* approaches to learning and studying in higher education, however, conceptualise writing practices as social and discuss 'student writing and learning as issues at the level of epistemology and identities rather than skills or socialisation (Lea and Street, 2000, p.35)'. From such a conceptual vantage point, writing and learning practices are embedded in beliefs about how the world can and should be known, how knowledge can and should be shared, and who has the authority to share that knowledge with whom. The writing practices of the academy then are seen as closely bound up with relationships of power and with issues of identity and self.

Lea and Street (2000, p33), make explicit that they take 'a hierarchical view of the relationship between the three models, privileging the "academic literacies" approach'. They explain:

We believe that in teaching as well as in research, addressing specific skills issues around student writing [...] takes on an entirely different meaning if the context is solely that of study skills, if the process is seen as part of academic socialization, or if it is viewed more broadly as an aspect



*of the whole institutional and epistemological context* (Lea and Street, 2000, p.33, my emphasis).

This chapter draws on Lea and Street's three models of student writing, privileging the *academic literacies* view, precisely because it provides an analytical frame to discuss the participant MA students' experiences and insights into language learning and teaching 'as an aspect of the whole institutional and epistemological context'. In the following interview extract Blanche, a North American student, explicates the different meanings that teaching ESL (English as a Second Language) seems to have taken on for different students on her course. She explains:

It's so insidious in a way, [...] the way that terms are used here are not the way that similar terms will be used in my background, like 'ideology' for example, ideology means something to me, but here people don't see it quite the same way and, as I mentioned in the first interview, to me ESL [...] is teaching students who come from other countries to an English speaking country, [...] who don't know English very well, helping them integrate into the mainstream school, to me that's the main purpose, that's kind of my area of interest, but here people don't seem to be concerned with that at all, and they seem to act like it's a matter of course that ESL is teaching in the Gulf, or teaching in Spain at a private language school, I mean to me that's just not ESL, I mean it is I guess, but it's a fringe element, I mean it's teaching English for profit, not for people who are in desperate need of it, [...] the great majority of them are ready to jet off to Hong Kong to do their stint at the British Council, or they just want to see the world, kind of teach English to see the world, and I'm not trying to seem judgemental, you know, I know that's a legitimate part of ESL teaching, but I guess when I say my ideas about teaching are different it's because I have a different interest focus.

(Blanche, 2nd interview, pp.3-4)



Blanche's point that 'the way that terms are used here are not the way that similar terms will be used in my background' is in line with Lea and Street's argument above. Blanche, like Lea and Street, locate the differences in the ways in which students and lecturers make use of contested terms such as 'ideology' or define literacy practices such as writing in higher education or 'teaching ESL' in institutional and epistemological contexts. In the context of this study, Street's (1997) argument that 'home background' and the knowledge and assumptions that learners bring to their learning affect 'deep levels of identity and epistemology' and, therefore, need to be taken seriously (see also chapter one, section one) can usefully be extended to teachers/lecturers who bring their prior knowledge and assumptions into the learning and teaching encounter, in other words, *their* background needs to be examined and treated seriously too. As discussed in chapter two, section one *Re-contextualising context*, context 'has the nasty habit of almost always seeming clear, transparent, and unproblematic, when it hardly ever actually is' Gee (1996, p.77). Blanche, like Gee, understands context, here the teaching 'background' of students on TESOL or ELT programmes, to be anything but unproblematic. It is the context in which MA students worked as English teaching professionals prior to taking up their studies which makes the meanings they give to it appear, in Gee's terms, 'clear, transparent and unproblematic'. As Blanche observes, some 'seem to act like *it's a matter of course* that ESL is teaching in the Gulf, or teaching in Spain at a private language school' (my emphasis). While to Blanche, given her teaching context, 'that's just not ESL' but teaching English 'to see the world', she acknowledges that, in fact, this is 'a legitimate part of ESL teaching'. In recognising that this kind of English

teaching is 'legitimate', Blanche presents herself as a professional who is not 'judgemental' but reasonable and fair in her evaluation of the various aspects of her colleagues' professional contexts. Blanche's comment also illuminates Lea and Street's *academic literacies perspective* as Blanche locates the meanings given to practices such as teaching ESL within their institutional and epistemological contexts. She recognises that giving meaning to contested terms and practices involves making judgements as those meanings are tied up with concerns about identity and self and relationships of power, as highlighted above. Professional 'background' or *context* then needs to be understood as being a central issue for MA students because, in Blanche's words: 'when I say my ideas about teaching are different it's because I have a different interest focus'. Her professional 'interest focus' is on teaching English to 'people who are in desperate need of it' and, consequently, to Blanche, ESL is 'teaching students who come from other countries to an English speaking country, [...] helping them integrate into the mainstream school' rather than 'teaching for profit'.

Such a broad social understanding of the significance of students' and teachers' context is critical if the task is to create and make use of space in learning and teaching for students to develop what Geisler (1995, p.116) calls 'rhetorical agency' (This argument will be developed further in section six below; see also discussion in chapter four, section four). As the following interview extract shows, it appears that Blanche was motivated to raise issues of concern for her in class discussions. Blanche observed:

Well, sometimes I said my opinion in the lectures, and whereas it felt perfectly straightforward to me, I would kind of meet with a little bit of a silence. [...] People just couldn't relate to what I was saying. [...]

MH: And everybody, the other students, you yourself, and the lecturer lived with the silence, there was nothing done to maybe ask 'well, what was going on here now'?

Blanche: No, because the lecturers themselves are British, so to them it may not have made sense either. And during my last term [...], the tutor that we had most of the time [...] I really could tell a definite effort on his part to not make me feel alienated, I mean I could tell that he was trying to, [...] sort of give legitimacy to what I said, but largely that doesn't happen I think

(Blanche, 2nd interview, p.5)

It appears that, except for this tutor who made 'a definite effort' to connect with the issues that Blanche was trying to raise and to 'give legitimacy', most of Blanche's fellow MA students and lecturers did not and Blanche would 'meet with a little bit of silence'. (See also chapter four for a discussion of Blanche's experiences and Linda's observation that 'things were just left suspended'.) The argument then in this section, and indeed in this chapter, is that 'giving legitimacy' to students' comments in class discussions, tutorials or in written assignments is a process that requires students and lecturers to address 'the whole institutional and epistemological context' (Lea and Street, 2000) of the concerns and questions that their contributions raise. It appears that such discussions have on the whole not been instigated on the MA programmes in this case study. While some tutors tried to 'not make (students) feel alienated', it appears that 'largely that doesn't happen', an experience that was also shared by Alison on her course

(see discussion in chapter four, section six). As the discussion in chapter four and in this section has shown, when Blanche or Linda tried to make a contribution by raising issues and questions, Blanche met ‘with a little bit of silence’ or ‘things were just left suspended’ (Linda, chapter four). The following sections further develop this argument and discuss the contested nature of literacy practices such as making a ‘contribution’.

## 2 The contested nature of literacy practices

*At the beginning of the course, everyone sort of feels uncomfortable, I think, about contributing.*

*Harry, 1st interview, p.1*

In all first interviews with the participant MA students, I introduced the focus of the study along the lines of my interest in ‘what is going on’ (see also chapter one, section one *Aims and objectives of the study*) in a multicultural group of mature MA students in a British postgraduate educational institution and in ‘things to do with identity, language, learning’ (see also Appendix 3.4). In his first interview, responding to my first lines into the interview, Harry said:

Harry: All right. Ehm, well, the first thing that I most notice about it is how, in whatever group I've been in on this course, the people who tend to contribute the most are the sort of 'the English people'. [...] And it's almost, because the teachers come from the same sort of background on the whole, all being English [...] I'm sure they, ehm, what's the word, it's as if they are teaching almost to the English people, rather than to the other, I mean, not consciously, but just because there is a lot more sort of shared knowledge, I think.



MH: Do you think that students are aware of this?

Harry: Ehm, yes, I'm sure, I don't know, it's difficult. At the beginning of the course, everyone sort of feels uncomfortable, I think, about contributing. And contribution, you know, sort of contributing in order, because you've got something to say, I don't think, it's sort of a, it's because you feel, you know, you ought to contribute something. And so it's the English people who tend to be able to do this, or maybe, you know, I can't really remember, well, yeah, it's the English people who tend to do this most. Well, I'm sure that people who don't have an (INAUDIBLE) English, who come from other countries, they must be conscious of the fact that they are not as able to contribute. I haven't spoken to them, to anyone. And the other English people, I think, yeah, some of them must, I don't think everyone is aware of this sort of, it is a cultural thing, and so they might just, they might wonder why the foreigners aren't contributing [...]

MH: So you think it has never been kind of a, something to talk about in class, nobody has ever said anything about it.

Harry: No, no.

(Harry, 1st interview, p.1-2)

It is significant that Harry's instantaneously in his first interview focuses on the practice of 'contribution' which, in his view, everyone 'feels uncomfortable' about. His response to my introduction focuses the interview directly on 'contributing/contribution', thus making *his* contribution to this research. While he observes that 'at the beginning of the course, *everyone* sort of feels uncomfortable about contributing' (my emphasis), he clarifies this recognising that 'it's the English people who tend to be able to do this', thus suggesting that *not everyone* is able to contribute. His comments highlight that 'the people who

tend to contribute' might have some 'shared knowledge' that enables them to contribute to and participate in classroom discussions. Harry then raises an additional concern about the reason why people (try to) contribute in class. In his view, 'contributing [...] because you've got something to say' might not necessarily be the reason why you would say something but rather 'because you feel [...] you *ought to* contribute something (my emphasis)'.

Harry's observation and concern about students contributing in class discussions, resonates with Rachael's comment, as discussed in chapter two, section seven. Rachael insisted that what someone said in class was meaningless unless it was put into the context of the cultural, educational and professional background that the student brought to his or her contribution in class. Rachael's and Harry's observations then are in line with Street (1997; see also chapter two) who maintains that literacy practices are

not only the observable behaviours around literacy [...] but also the concepts and meanings brought to those events [...] which give them meaning' (Street, 1997, p.50).

Street (2000) further develops the concept of literacy practices, drawing on his earlier study (Street, 1984) of literacies utilised in Iranian villages:

What began to emerge as literacy practices were uses and meanings of literacy that were identifiable around [...] domains of social activity (Street, 2000, p.22).

In the context of this study then, 'domains of social activity' can be understood to be student writing or classroom activities such as classroom discussions, tutorials,

or group work, in which the students participating in those activities draw on ‘the concepts and meanings (they) brought to those events’ in order to give meaning to but also understand what is expected of them as participants in those events/activities. Street here uses ‘events’ and ‘activities’ as synonyms to help him define his notion of ‘literacy practices’. As Street (2000) points out, the phrase ‘literacy practice’ is

often taken for granted and authors do not always explicitly address what that means to them. It has become ‘naturalised’ as Fairclough [...] would say – we all assume we know what is meant by it (Street, 2000, p.17).

Street maintains that ‘such naturalisation is always a dangerous moment’ and suggests to safeguard against it by making explicit the meanings and assumptions that underpin critical terms and phrases (Street, 2000, p.17). Street’s concept of ‘literacy practices’ develops further the notion of ‘literacy events’ (Heath, 1982a; Barton, 1994). As Street points out, literacy *events* as an analytic concept

remains descriptive and, from an anthropological point of view, it does not tell us how meanings get constructed. If you were to observe a particular literacy event as a non-participant who was not familiar with its conventions, you would have difficulty following what is going on. (2000, p.21).

The analytic work thus needs to move on from describing units of events/activities to understanding how the meanings of literacy practices such as the practice of ‘contributing/contribution’ get constructed by students (and lecturers). The analytic tool of literacy *practices* thus enables us to tap into, in Street’s words,

broader cultural conception of particular ways of thinking about and doing reading and writing in cultural contexts (2000, p.22).

Extending the concept of literacy practices as an analytic concept to include not only 'doing reading and writing' but also speaking and listening will help us understand better how the participant MA students have attempted to give meaning to the literacy practice of 'contribution', bringing their conceptions of language, identity and learning (see Hewitt in chapter one, section two) to the classroom activities on their MA programme.

Street's concern to safeguard against terms such as 'literacy practices' becoming 'naturalised' ties in with Gee's (1996) concept of what he calls a 'socially contested term'. These are terms 'describing social relationships' (1996, p.15); people involved in those relationships use such terms to mean different things.

Gee explains:

very often 'truth' and 'correctness' play no role, or much less of one than we would like to think. In an argument [...] over the foundations of social beliefs, there will nearly always be what I will call socially contested terms. [...] One such term [...] is the word 'correct' (1996:15).

This chapter argues that 'contribution' is a 'socially contested term' or, more to the point, that contribution is a socially contested 'practice'. In other words, there is contestation over the meaning of 'contribution' as a practice and the social relationships it describes. In the context of this study then this is to say that MA students, and their tutors and lecturers, give different meanings to the social practice of making a contribution in a classroom as they bring different expectations, meanings and assumptions to the activity. Thus, they will have



different ideas of why and when one *ought to* contribute, why ‘contributing’ appears to be desirable in MA classroom encounters, and why people might decide to contribute or not and they will, indeed, have different understandings of what makes a ‘good’, ‘correct’ or ‘appropriate’ contribution. (See also discussion in chapter four *Gaps in perceptions of ‘appropriateness’ and language ‘competence’*.) As Gee observes, ‘lots of words that don’t look it turn out to be socially contested terms (1996:16)’. As the analysis reported in this chapter will show, the practice of ‘contribution’ in postgraduate classrooms appears to be one of them.

The analysis in the following sections, then, is concerned with questions such as how do MA students give meaning to the practice of ‘contribution’? How could it be that, according to Harry, ‘at the beginning of the course, everyone sort of feels uncomfortable’? Yet, why is it that ‘it’s the English people who tend to be able to do this’ and ‘who tend to do this most’? Is it that students feel uncomfortable because contributing feels like they are being examined? Do students contribute because they feel they *ought to* contribute something, and *not* because they have something to say? Why must students ‘who come from other countries [...] be conscious of the fact that they are not as able to contribute’? Why is it that ‘the foreigners aren’t contributing’? Is it, as Harry suggests, ‘a cultural thing’? Is it because of the students’ language? What language? Or are these concerns tied in with broader social aspects of literacy practices and discourse? The aim of the analysis is to help better understand the conflicting and contested nature of literacy practices in the university, in particular the practice of students contributing to lectures, class discussions, or group tutorials.

### 3 Contribution as a transferable skill

*It's quite a specialised technique, thinking about it, being able to make a snappy contribution in a sort of semi-lecture situation.*

*Harry, 2nd interview, p.8*

Students need to and want to meet institutional expectations in order to succeed on their courses. On the other hand, as the analysis so far has already illustrated, students bring their own questions and issues based on their professional experience and expertise to their classes, and their own agendas of what they want to achieve on their courses and how they want to achieve it. At first glance, expectations seem to be indicators of what is to be, of what is to come; at second glance, however, expectations seem to carry with them a history of prior experience to the one to be encountered. As discussed above, Gee argues that what counts as ‘good’ and ‘correct’ and what ‘ought to’ happen in a given context is closely tied up with theory:

Theories, in this sense, ground beliefs and claims to know things (1996, p.12).

In other words, expectations of practices such as contributing in classroom encounters are linked to theories and have to be understood in terms of those theories. Consequently, the analysis in this chapter will have to shed theoretical light on the practice of contribution and the ways in which it is linked to broader cultural and social conceptions of particular ways of doing. This analytical approach is in line with Gee’s argument that ‘apart from Discourses, language and literacy are meaningless’ (Gee, 1996, p.190). As discussed in chapter two (section

two), this study assumes that the epistemological constructs that underpin the uses of language and literacy and the ways in which literacy is being ‘practiced’ are neither neutral nor ‘given’ but socially constructed and, therefore, contested.

Focusing on the notion of ‘contribution’ in postgraduate education, the chapter will suggest a shift away from concepts of ‘competence’ and ‘appropriateness’ in language learning and language teaching towards concepts of contributing as meaning making and of contribution as social practice.

Lea and Street’s (1997, 2000) three models of *study skills*, *academic socialisation*, and *academic literacies* will help illuminate the ways in which the beliefs and expectations that MA students hold about the practice of ‘contributing’ can be linked to theoretical constructs that underpin language and learning. In order to structure the analysis, this and the following two sections of this chapter, juxtapose quotes from Harry’s second interview with each of Lea and Street’s three models of *study skills*, *academic socialisation* and *academic literacies*. This structure can help make the connection between the ways in which the participant MA students construct meanings of the practice of contribution and perceive the social relationships that the expectation of contributing in class instigates and the concepts and meanings of language and literacy that they, and their lecturers, have brought to their learning and teaching encounters.

In the following extract from Harry’s second interview, he and I are exploring the frustration that he has felt when, in a class discussion, he had ‘missed the point completely’ (see also chapter four):



MH: To me this relates a bit again to contributing, or what people understand by 'contributing'. (Hmm.) Is it really just making, saying something and then that's it, or is it giving people the chance to follow something through and allowing other people to, you know, see what the point was and ask for further details, or, you know, well, I don't want to call it explanation, really, but to find out why the person is trying to make this sort of contribution.

Harry: Ehm, no, I don't think that happens, it's just, especially when you are making a point, when you are trying to make a point so simply, and it's quite a specialised technique, thinking about it, being able to make a snappy contribution in a sort of semi-lecture situation.

(Harry, 2nd interview, p.8)

Harry appears to deny my suggestion that contributing in class might be about 'giving people the chance to follow something through' or about finding out 'why the person is trying to make this sort of contribution'. Instead, his understanding that 'being able to make a snappy contribution' is 'quite a specialised technique' locates this interpretation at the level of learning a *skill*, a technique that enables students to make a quick and 'snappy' contribution to a classroom discussion. While his understanding that this is 'quite a *specialised* technique' (my emphasis) could be seen to indicate that Harry views this technique as specialised to fit different academic ways of talking, at this point Harry appears to be more concerned about the skill of making quick and 'snappy contribution'. Lea and Street (1997, 2000) suggest that the *study skills* approach to student writing is based on a model of language that emphasises surface features of form, and breaks language learning and language use into sets of 'appropriate' and transferable oral and written skills that need to be acquired. It is based, they argue, on a theory of language that views student learning from a narrow technical and



instrumental perspective. When Harry talks about making ‘a snappy contribution in a semi-lecture situation’ he is talking about the ‘technique’ or the *skill* of getting into, and out of, an ongoing discussion. Talking about ‘people who come from other countries (who) must be conscious of the fact that they are not as able to contribute’, he appears to conceptualise their way of contributing to lacking this specialised technique. He seems to suggest that students who are non-native speakers of English have a ‘deficit’ and that they need to learn these rules and techniques if they want to enter classroom discussions. However, native speakers of English also have problems finding the right way of ‘hitting the spot’. As Harry put it: ‘you think you are making your point, and then sometimes your point might hit the spot, and sometimes it's not’ (see chapter four, section six).

#### **4 Contribution as a transparent cultural concept**

*It might be to do with the sort of expected discourse of contribution.  
Harry, 2nd interview, p.6*

In contrast to Harry’s understanding of contributing as a surface-level transferable skill, analysed in the previous section, the following extract from Harry’s second interview elaborates on the practice of contribution in terms of deeper levels of cultural expectations:

Harry: It might be to do with the sort of expected discourse of contribution, [...] if someone is, in the way they speak isn’t expressing their ideas in the way that you are sort of expected to [...], then it might be that [...] people are not so sure about it.  
(Harry, 2nd interview, p.6)

Here, Harry gives meaning to ‘the sort of expected discourse of contribution’ in the context of cultural expectations that are shared by some students but not by others. Harry explains, as discussed in chapter four, section six: ‘There is just some expectation of what to contribute, how to contribute. [...] If somebody comes from outside that, has to learn that, I think’ (Harry, 2nd interview, p.7). His view ties in with the approach that Lea and Street (1997, 2000) termed *academic socialisation*: while some students are insiders to their university’s culture and, therefore, already know what to contribute and how to contribute, others are outsiders and may need to learn the conventions and ways speaking and writing if they want to become members of this insider and ‘expert’ community. Harry observed in his first interview (see section two above), ‘the people who tend to contribute the most are the sort of “the English people” and because the teachers come from the same sort of background [...], it’s as if they are teaching almost to the English people rather than to the other’. And if, as Harry explains here in his second interview, someone ‘isn’t expressing their ideas’ in the expected way ‘then it might be that people are not so sure about it.’ In other words, students who ‘in the way they speak’ appear to not fit in may not be taken seriously. Consequently, in Harry’s view, it is critical for the success of those students that they learn as ‘apprentices’ what is expected and ‘appropriate’ through processes of socialisation and acculturation. (See also the detailed discussion of the social rather than ‘given’ nature of judgements of ‘competence’ and ‘appropriateness’ in chapter four, section five.) Harry’s construction then of contributing as ‘the sort of expected discourse of contribution’ is also line with Lea and Street’s perspective on academic *socialisation*. This approach, they argue, assumes

that the academy is a relatively homogenous culture, whose norms and practices have simply to be learnt to provide access to the whole institution (2000, p.35).

That is to say that 'access' is a key notion in the academic socialisation approach and that the cultural norms, conventions and expectations which students need to acquire in order to gain access to the institution are transparent and 'out there' for students to learn and to adjust to. Furthermore, the assumption that 'the academy is a relatively homogenous culture' will not only make those norms transparent but also easy for students to 'switch' from one set of expectations to another (Lea and Street, 1998, p.161). However, as discussed in chapter four, section six, rather than being homogenous and 'given', cultural norms and practices are fluid and contested. As a result, even Harry, as a male white native speaker of English who has come to his MA course having been through English universities before, does not get it 'right' all the time.

The following extract from Maya's first interview helps further challenge the notion of contribution as a transparent cultural concept. Answering my very broad question about the interaction going on in her group, she said:

Maya: But the more you attend the lecture, the more you can notice, of course, some people make a good point [...] but sometimes people just talk, before they think or something. That is for me amazing. [...] I'm Japanese, and [...] we can't do that. We need to be [...] called: Maya, what do you think? In that case, most of the people can talk about their opinion, but sometimes having no opportunity to talk, sometimes people just sit there and listen to the lecture. [...] This is very dangerous in a way, in the West, because if you don't speak anything, people think you don't think anything,

or whatever. So in a way when I speak English, I try to express more and more, but [...] if I do this in Japanese, people might think: oh, you speak too much.

(Maya, 1st interview, pp.1-2)

Maya has experienced on her course that the academic ‘culture’ and academic communities are not homogenous. Not only does Maya feel uneasy with ‘the expected discourse of contribution’, she is even more concerned about what people might make of her contributing or not contributing in class, because ‘if you don’t speak anything, people think you don’t think anything’, but ‘if you do this in Japanese, people might think: oh, you speak too much’ (see also chapter one, section one). This illustrates Street’s (1993) argument that the reification and ‘the unselfconscious nominalisation of culture [...] hides its essentially changing character and process nature (1993, p.27)’. Maya here appears to have internalised and reified cultural ways as those ‘in the West’ and those ‘in Japanese’. While these fixed and ‘fossilised’ notions of cultural ways may help her to ‘try to speak more and more’ so she can ‘fit in’, they also contribute to her being disconcerted by the nature and differences in expectations of how knowledge can be shared and negotiated in classrooms across various contexts within academia: the discourse that is expected of her in class is *not her* way of contributing. The discussion in the following sections will further develop a deeper and socially embedded understanding of the teaching and learning practices that the participant students encountered on their Master’s courses.



## 5 Contribution as a social and cultural practice

*You are allowing students to discover things for themselves, or to make whatever knowledge that is relevant to them in this situation, and I think the idea of contributing is based on this.*

*Harry, 2nd interview, p.2*

Harry's different constructions and interpretations of the classroom practice of contributing as, on the one hand, 'quite a specialised technique' and, on the other hand, 'a sort of expected discourse of contribution' have not only helped structure the analysis in this chapter so far but also challenged notions of contribution as a *transferable skill* and of contribution as a *transparent cultural concept*. The argument to be made here is that the processes involved in gaining 'access' to the cultural practices that take place within academic fields of knowledge and university classrooms do not call up 'language' issues of how to make a 'snappy contribution' or how to write or contribute in the expected conventional ways but issues of Discourse, in Gee's terms, and academic literacies, in Street's terms, and the social meanings and identities that they invoke. The analysis then, drawing on Gee's (1996) notion of terms which are 'socially contested' as they describe, in Gee's words,

social relationships which one can choose to use in any of several different ways and where such choices carry significant social and moral consequences (1996, p.15),

can conceptualise the 'the idea of contributing' as a *social and cultural practice*.

In the following extract from Harry's second interview, he responds to my question about what he thought was the rationale behind lecturers asking people to contribute:

There is two models, as far as I see it, of teaching: one is that you are imparting knowledge, and one is that you are allowing students to discover things for themselves, or to make whatever knowledge that is relevant to them in this situation, and I think the idea of contributing is based on this, but I think it's such a half-hearted approach here. I don't think I could say I could bring anything to this course, or that I can offer anything to this course, because in the end we'll be assessed on how much you've learned, yeah? You'd have to go *much* further in the direction of contribution, contributing to go on and have a sort of group, peer group teaching, small group discussions, all that, so that students themselves are sort of creating a course almost, to say that you can offer something. [...] They pay lip-service to contributing, in the end they have lecture notes, which is what they want to get through, want to give to you, so I don't, so there is just not the possibility for, to *bring* things to the course, I mean. [...] And inevitably it's sort of the institution that we are in taking a more traditional approach.

(Harry, 2nd interview, p.2, his emphasis)

This extract from Harry's interview is complex not only because of its length (which cannot be cut down as each point will be taken up in the analysis) but also because his response to the interview question about the 'rationale behind lecturers asking people to contribute' immediately links students' expectations of their learning and their lecturers' teaching models. In other words, Harry here explores students' contributions as a social and cultural *practice* within the institutional and cultural context of learning and teaching on an MA in ELT/TESOL course. Such an analytical frame enables us to examine the social meanings, or 'rationale', behind lecturers' expectations of student contributions but also the social relationships that students and teachers/lecturers engage in as they contribute and respond to classroom discussions. Harry elaborates on 'the

idea of contribution' which he ties in with his understanding of a model of teaching which is *not* about 'imparting knowledge' but, instead, 'allowing students to discover things for themselves, or to make whatever knowledge that is relevant to them in this situation'. To him, 'the idea of contributing is based on this'. It appears that this notion of contributing goes beyond students learning how they can make a contribution that fits in with the expected norms and conventions. In other words, here Harry's notion of contribution is *not* that of a 'transferable skill' or a 'transparent cultural concept', as discussed in the previous sections, which students need to 'access' if they want to *be heard in class*. Instead, Harry develops his understanding of the practice of contribution into the direction of students offering their own issues, questions and arguments and *their contributions to be heard in class*. The analysis here then is in line with Lea and Street's notion of *academic literacies* as an analytic lens to better understand broader social aspects of the 'whole institutional and epistemological context' (Lea and Street, 2000), as discussed in section one above.

However, Harry feels he could not offer anything to his Master's course because his lecturers had 'lecture notes, which is what they want to get through'. It appears that, in his view, what counted was the knowledge that was 'imparted' to students during lectures and the assessment of what students have 'learned' from their lecturers. In Harry's words, lecturers 'they pay lip-service to contributing' and 'there is just not the possibility to *bring* things to the course' as a student. Harry's challenge to teaching as 'imparting knowledge' is in line with models of writing and learning that Geisler (1995) maintained repress 'the rhetorical agency that motivates us to pick up the pen (or turn on the computer) in the first place



(Geisler, 1995, p.116; see also chapter four, section four)'. Harry's expectation that students would have 'peer group teaching, small group discussions' appears to be in conflict with the institution's 'more traditional approach'. His analysis: 'you'd have to go *much* further in the direction of contribution' is informed not only by his position as a student who is keen to 'contribute' but also by his identity position as a teacher. He is keen to *be* a teacher and be involved in activities such as peer group teaching, 'all that, so that students themselves are sort of creating a course almost'. In the context of this study then, models of teaching and learning that 'pay lip-service' to the notion of student contribution need to be understood as hindering and constraining the possibility for students to 'bring things' and to 'discover things for themselves', making the kind of contributions such as peer group teaching that some students are motivated to develop but might feel discouraged to offer on their MA course.

Furthermore, Harry clearly locates the fact that, in his view, 'there is just not the possibility to bring things to the course' within its institutional context and its power to control what can and cannot be done. This further invokes an academic *literacies* approach to understanding the nature of student participation in teaching and learning, which suggests an interpretation of cultural practices at the level of epistemologies and identities and views learning encounters as sites of contestation over relations of power and authority. Harry's analysis and notion of 'the idea of contributing' ties in with this social practice perspective by alluding to such struggle and contestation over who is in a position to take decisions on whether students will be given space 'to discover things for themselves' and 'to make whatever knowledge that is relevant to them'. The following extract from



Blanche's second interview shows that she too felt that she could not develop her 'interest focus' (see also section one above) and make it relevant not only to her but also to her colleagues', that is her fellow MA students', professional concerns. Responding to my question what it is that she felt she could bring to the course, she said:

Well, I guess I can offer my own background. The fact that I'm concerned with the needs of children in state schools, and a lot of people here, that's not their main interest, so I guess my concern for that is adding something to my colleagues' awareness. My own difficulties and questions, if I share them with my colleagues, that inevitably adds something to their own thoughts I would think.

(Blanche, 2nd interview, p.9)

Blanche's notion of offering her background and bringing her own 'difficulties and questions' as it 'inevitably adds something' to her colleagues thinking about their specific learning and teaching contexts ties in with Harry's concern about students 'making whatever knowledge that is relevant' to their professional and epistemological contexts. Lea and Street's concept of an *academic literacies* approach to learning and writing in higher education, which recognises that students need to 'handle the social meanings and identities' (Lea and Street, 2000, p.35) that academic practices invoke, enables us to draw attention to the 'deep affective and ideological conflicts' (Lea and Street, 2000, p.35; see also discussion in chapter four, section two) that Harry and Blanche describe here. Harry analyses the link between students' and lecturers' theories which, in Gee's terms, 'ground beliefs and claims to know things' (1996; p.12; see above) and their expectations and interpretations of the classroom practices they engage in.

He recognises and theorises the link between the *expectations* that teachers and students bring to their classrooms and the *theories of language and learning* that underpin their respective ‘ways of knowing’. His analysis suggests that if, as Lea and Street (2000, p.32) argue, ‘learning in higher education involves adapting to new ways of knowing: new ways of understanding, interpreting and organising knowledge’, the MA students in this case study were left out of the very processes that constitute learning on Master’s courses, namely a critical and reflexive examination of such ‘new ways of knowing’ and the theories that underpin ‘claims to know things’.

## 6 Students developing rhetorical agency

*Maybe the point could be explored and even taken further than the individual could have thought that it could be taken.*  
*Alison, 1st interview, p.3*

The analysis thus far in this chapter has shown that the meanings that lecturers and students give to terms and practices such as ‘contribution/contributing’ are not unproblematic they are linked to underlying theoretical constructs of language and literacy. It is a key point in this case study that for the participant MA students, who are themselves professionals in the field of English language teaching, those meanings have consequences for the ways in which they will construct, *as teachers*, what ‘contributing/contribution’ might mean in their classrooms when they return to their schools or universities on completion of their MA programme. Equally, the MA students draw on the professional insight that they have gained prior to their MA studies as they are giving meaning to the practice of contribution *as students*. In Harry’s second interview, following on

from the comment analysed in the section above in which he elaborated on ‘the idea of contribution’, I asked him why he thought that ‘such a half-hearted approach’ was taken on his MA course to the idea of contributing and the model of teaching that would ‘allow students to discover things for themselves, or to make whatever knowledge that is relevant to them’:

MH: Why do you think it is done only half-heartedly?

Harry: Only half-heartedly. I think it's possibly an institutional thing. It also may be because a lot of the lecturers aren't teachers, or haven't been teachers for a long time. You know, the person, I mean, the classes that you came to when I was there, those where the ones which I think went furthest towards actually making contributing a worth-while thing.

(Harry, 2nd interview, pp.2-3)

Similar to his way of nominalising ‘culture’ as a *thing* (see chapter four, section six) and similar to Maya (section four), who reified the cultural practices she encountered in Britain as those ‘in the West’ and the ones she knew from back home as those ‘in Japan’, Harry appears to have given meaning to institutional processes and practices in terms of a homogenous and fixed ‘institutional thing’. In Maya’s example above it was argued that, as a result of her interpreting what is expected ‘in the West’ and ‘in Japan’ as a fixed norm, she limited her opportunities to share and negotiate her knowledge as a student in her MA classes. Drawing on Street (1993), the point was also made in chapter four that such reification conceals the fluid and contested nature of constructs such as ‘culture’ or, in this case, ‘institution’. The analysis in section four demonstrated that, both Maya and Harry appear to have leaned in their interpretation of ‘the expected



discourse of contribution' towards a more static notion of institutional practices, norms and conventions as a 'thing' rather than cultural constructs that are open to change and contestation. From the cultural and social practice approach that underpins the analysis here, it can be argued that their *identity position as students* may have locked them into a reified notion of 'culture' and 'institution' and their respective practices which, as students, they can 'access' through processes of socialisation and acculturation, as discussed above. In his interpretation here, however, Harry seems to draw again (see section five) on *his professional identity and insight as a teacher* when he observes that 'a lot of the lecturers aren't teachers, or haven't been teachers for a long time'. This identity position also enables him to take account of the way in which different lecturers on his MA course engage differently in institutional practices or, as discussed in section five, adhere to different 'models of teaching'. He is thus able to see that one of his lecturers 'went furthest towards actually making contributing a worth-while thing', suggesting that other lecturers also went into this direction but achieving or aiming for different levels of student engagement and participation. It appears that, as students, Maya and Harry may have perceived their 'agency' in developing the rhetorical tools expected on their course as constrained (Geisler, 1995; see also section one above). In contrast, it seems that drawing on his identity and insight *as a teacher* enabled Harry to analyse and challenge the 'half-hearted approach' that some of his lecturers have taken to the idea of 'contributing'.

It is at the level of epistemologies and identities then that students give meaning to practices such as 'contribution/contributing' and to classrooms as sites of knowledge making and struggle over ways in which they may or may not



contribute their experience and professional insights. Taking such a cultural and social practice approach can enable students to formulate and negotiate what they want to achieve on their courses and how they can go about achieving it. Crucially, it also enables them to critically and reflexively examine whether in their own teaching practices they would be able to go beyond ‘paying lip-service to contributing’ and to ‘actually making contributing a worth-while thing’ for *their* students. As Linda poignantly said in her second interview:

Much as we are students, we are teachers.

(Linda, Focus group discussion, p.22)

The extract below from Alison’s second interview is in line with Linda claiming professional status for herself. It further demonstrates how issues of control over knowledge and teaching/learning agendas are implicated in classroom encounters and exposes what Harry described as ‘paying lip-service to contributing’.

Responding to my question about the interaction going on in her MA group and the things that were important to her as being one of the people in the group,

Alison said:

My view is that really we need to do a lot [...] to try and find better means of trying to interact and maybe knowing each other better. This shows itself sometimes in the kind of comments that people get when they contribute in class. Sometimes if maybe the lecturers have told themselves that you don't really have much to offer, [...] even if you try to come up with a point [...] sometimes it is just brushed aside, but one asks themselves, if maybe that point was raised by somebody else, somebody that the lecturers perceive to be a better student, in quote, because I don't

know what that means, maybe the point could be explored and even taken further than the individual could have thought that it could be taken.  
(Alison, 1st interview, p.3)

Alison here raises the issue of who counts as a ‘better’ student, ‘in quote’ because she does not know ‘what that means’. She is disappointed that some students’ contributions are sometimes just ignored. For example, on one occasion when Alison raised the issue of language not being a neutral medium of instruction which is pertinent to her professional context in Botswana (see also chapter four, section six), her point was ‘brushed aside’ by her teacher saying: ‘Right, let’s move on then (my fieldnotes)’. Like Blanche, who wants to offer her own background and her ‘difficulties and questions’ to be debated (see section five above), it seems that Alison wants her questions and contributions to be taken seriously; she wants her teachers to use *their* knowledge to take *her* point further so that knowledge could be constructed in classroom interactions in such a way that ‘maybe the point could be explored and even taken further than the individual could have thought that it could be taken’. Alison’s account of how she attempted to bring *her* question into a lecture also highlights how ‘the cultural and contextual component’ (Lea and Street, 2000, p.33) of learning and teaching practices, if ignored, can hinder or even impede ‘new ways of understanding, interpreting and organizing knowledge’ (see also discussion in section five).

## **7      Contested issues of authority over knowledge, power and identity**

*People who belong to the dominant culture, sort of have a power because they are the most fluent in the ways of life, the ways of interacting, I mean this is their home turf so to speak.*

*Blanche, 2 interview, p.10*

The previous section argued that for students to develop what Geisler (1995) called ‘rhetorical agency’ in order to put their ‘questions and difficulties’ as well as their professional background and expertise on the teaching and learning agenda, teachers/lecturers cannot afford to ignore the cultural and institutional contextual components that impact on the teaching and learning encounter. This point will be developed further in this section with a special focus on the ‘question of working in groups, and pair work’. In the following interview extract, Francisco is paying particular attention to what he calls the ‘task based approach’, the approach taken by his teachers to involve students in classroom interaction:

I think it’s a very interesting thing, this question of working in groups, and pair work. [...] I think the task based approach was immediately taken as the way, the good way to go about teaching, and that was what was basically done all the time. And I didn’t, many times I enjoyed it, but some other times I did not. But I, as I say, it may have to do with my learning style as well: I like teachers talking, I like teachers giving us their input, you know, because I think we are old enough, it’s not a matter of age, we are academically mature enough to filter it, you see. I would like many more times my teachers to say, well, I think this is A and B, and not C and D, and the reasons why I believe this are the following. And not this feeling of uncertainty around everything, I mean this is an exaggeration, poor things. They don’t want to impose any view on you.

(Francisco, 1st interview, pp.6-7)

Francisco is almost explicit about the fact that he did *not* like the task based approach that his lecturers appeared to take as ‘the good way to go about teaching’ but hedges his comments about task based approaches to teaching:

‘many times I enjoyed it, but some other times I did not’. He further mediates this



ambivalence suggesting that it ‘may have to do with (his) learning style as well’. It seems that what his teachers took as ‘the good way’ was not necessarily ‘good’ or ‘appropriate’ for his learning. He likes ‘teachers talking’ and would have preferred them ‘giving (students) their input’. Rather than having ‘this feeling of uncertainty around everything’, Francisco would have liked his teachers to be certain and ‘give’ students the kind of ‘input’ that they need so they can support their ideas, using their lecturers’ prestigious knowledge. It seems he would have been quite happy if his teachers had consistently followed the more traditional model of teaching, which Harry (section five) described as teachers ‘imparting knowledge’. However, while Francisco gives high status to his lecturer’s input, at the same time he feels that students are ‘old enough’ and, more importantly, ‘academically mature enough to filter it’. Like Harry then, he appears to believe that lecturers should allow and encourage ‘students to discover things for themselves’. Crucially, his comment that his lecturers’ ‘don’t want to impose any view on you’ appears to go a step further suggesting that his lecturers’ input stopped short of sharing their own critical understanding of *why* they believed ‘this is A and B, and not C and D’.

Francisco’s analysis then adds a key point to the argument in this section, suggesting that any knowledge ‘input’ needs to be examined and discussed in its cultural and epistemological context. Such a view of knowledge as socially and historically embedded precludes any suggestion that it could be ‘imposed’ as it is based on the premise of critical and reflexive examination of its underlying theoretical assumptions and values. Such a premise is also in line with Alison’s expectation (see previous section) that she should be given time and space to



speak from *her* professional and cultural position and get other experts and practitioners in the field, lecturers and students, to engage in critical and reflexive classroom discussion of different theoretical perspectives. Like Francisco, Blanche was concerned about the way in which classroom interaction was organised, exploring the notion of 'working in small groups':

MH: You were also saying that when you were working in small groups sometimes your approach was pretty obvious to you but not to the others. Do you think this is a problem in small group work only, or in general.

Blanche: Well, if it's a problem in small group work, it probably has implications for other things that go on, I would think.

MH: Like what?

Blanche: Well, probably [...] because with group work it's social what's going on because you're interacting, so if there is a problem with the interaction on that level it probably has implications, [...] because definitely in group work my approach is: everybody should have the chance to speak, everyone's opinion should be respected, and if somebody doesn't speak, the other members should considerately give that person the opportunity, because some people have to be asked, they won't just jump in. [...] I have not seen any of my British colleagues do that, I'm not saying that all of them are a certain way, but I just haven't seen that happen. And I think that has implications for sort of the silenced voice of the overseas students [...]. I mean people who belong to the dominant culture, sort of have a power because they are the most fluent in the ways of life, the ways of interacting, I mean this is their home turf so to speak, they can, I mean they know the system, so their way is the way it is.

MH: Why would you then give in to this way?

Blanche: [...] I mean if you're in a place, it's not your home [...] you can't exactly expect the whole culture to change just because of you, I mean and if you try to fight it, other people are not going to understand you anyway, and you're hurt, you feel, ehm, what's wrong with me, no one seems to understand what I am saying, it must be me [...] I just kind of gave up sometimes.

(Blanche, 2 interview, pp.9-10)

To Blanche, small group work is no small thing. As she explains, while her approach to working in small groups is 'pretty obvious' to her, it is 'not to the others'. This observation ties in with Maya's comment (section four) that Japanese students, for example, 'need to be called: Maya, what do you think?'. In Maya's view, teachers need to create for students the 'opportunity to talk'. It appears that Blanche takes this point further suggesting that in group work 'everybody should have the chance to speak, everyone's opinion should be respected and if somebody doesn't speak, the other members should considerately give that person the opportunity, because some people have to be asked, they won't just jump in'. Blanche's observation 'if it's a problem in small group work, it probably has implications for other things that go on' ties in with Peirce's (1989) argument that

teaching, like language, is not a neutral practice. Teachers, whether consciously or not, help to organize the way students perceive themselves and the world (1989, p.408).

Teaching is 'not a neutral practice', neither is 'small group work'. As Blanche points out, 'with group work it's social what's going on, because you're interacting'. In the context of 'small group work' it may seem as though teachers would hand control over the interaction to students. However, as Blanche

observed, teachers need to remind students that in group work they need to give each other the opportunity to speak because, if they do not, this ‘has implications for sort of the silenced voice of the overseas students’. It is this broader pedagogical and epistemological context then within which classroom interaction needs to be organised and understood. (For further discussion see chapter six, section seven.) This argument also resonates with Villegas (1991) who maintains that

most of us don’t think of the classroom as having a culture. [...] The classroom is not a neutral arena in which all students operate on the same basis. To succeed in school, children have to master the subject matter, and equally important and often overlooked, children need to know how to operate in the classroom. This is not a simple matter of learning the rules and regulations, but rather a much *more complex task* (1991, p.4, my emphasis).

As argued above, teaching is not a neutral practice. Similarly, while ‘most of us don’t think of classrooms as having a culture’, they are in fact ‘not a neutral arena’. Instead, the ways in which classrooms operate are embedded in broader social, cultural and institutional contexts. As Blanche observed, ‘people who belong to the dominant culture have a power because they are the most fluent in the ways of life, the ways of interacting’. While she is aware that ‘you can’t exactly expect the whole culture to change just because of you’, she nevertheless experienced moments when she could not avoid feeling that ‘no one seems to understand what I am saying, it must be me’. Blanche, in her own words, ‘kind of gave up sometimes’. It is important to reiterate here that Blanche is a North American native-English speaking student as it again enables us to examine classroom ‘interaction’ not as a ‘language’ issue but, in Villega’s terms, a rather ‘more complex task’. Maya’s comment ‘if you don’t speak anything, people think



you don't think anything' but 'if you do this in Japanese, people might think: oh, you speak too much' (section four) further illuminates the complex nature of this task. The argument can be made then that teachers/lecturers need to *not just know but understand* where students come from to be able to contextualise why some students might not speak or 'give up' sometimes. Teachers *and* students need to safeguard against students, native and non-native, feeling left out by instigating reflexive discussions of often taken-for-granted assumptions about student participation and the practice of contribution.

Blanche, Francisco, Alison, Harry and Maya all sit in the same classrooms, keen to get involved in academic debates and to critically engage with the knowledge of the scholars in their professional field but also keen to challenge their lecturers and other students' knowledge with their own. This chapter argues that for them to find and follow their own paths into the academic community and into academic debates, power, knowledge and expertise *cannot* be conceptualised as being exercised solely from one point in those debates. This view is underpinned by Geisler's (1994) argument, discussed in chapter three (section three), that 'experts are not the only ones who can make connections between specialized content and experience. They are simply the only ones whose experience counts' (Geisler 1994, p.93). The analysis and discussion in this chapter can make a contribution to our understanding of some of the ways in which knowledge and expertise are constructed and contested in classrooms on MA in ELT or TESOL programmes and how students perceive *their* input to those processes. This argument is also in line with Luke (1996a) who, analysing Foucault's views on power, observes that



power always unfolds in relation to local sites and subjects, and [...] participants in local sites are complicit and necessary for the playing out of power/knowledge relations (Luke, 1996a, p.325).

The argument and discussion in this chapter suggest that postgraduate classrooms in universities are sites in which increasingly some students who perceive themselves as professionals and as ‘experts’ in their own right will want to share their knowledge and expertise and engage in debates which may contest and transform the knowledge brought to their classrooms both by teachers/lecturers and students. Morson (1986), reflecting on dialogue in academic debates, writes:

Perhaps the sudden and dramatic interest in Bakhtin arises from his emphasis on debate as open, fruitful, and existentially meaningful at a time when our theoretical writings have become increasingly closed, repetitive, and ‘professional’. [...] Genuine dialogue always presupposes that something, but not everything, can be known. (Morson, 1986, *viii*).

It appears then that some at least of the participant MA students were asking for ‘genuine dialogue’ in their classrooms for them to develop their ‘rhetorical agency’ both as students and as professionals; they were keen to enter professional and academic debates in which their ‘contribution’ counts. The chapter has argued that contested notions of authority over knowledge, power and identity impact on the ways in which students conceptualise the practice of ‘contributing/contribution’ in university classrooms. This case study presents ‘contribution’ as a concept that enables us to understand these broader theoretical constructs in the context of postgraduate education. It is within this broader conceptual and contextual framework of competing methodologies and epistemologies that the use of such terms as ‘contested’ literacy practice is located.

The practice of ‘contribution’ has been shown to be such a contested literacy practice in the university.

The participant MA students’ contributions to this case study have broadened not only my horizon as a researcher but also my horizon as a teacher, as will be discussed in chapter seven *Cycles of adjustment – a reflexive look back and ahead*. Chapter six *Student voice in university classrooms – un/available discourses and narratives* will take up the dialogue where the students and I had to leave it in the research interviews. It will be argued that generating ‘research spaces’ such as interviews and focus group discussions can help formulate and construct ‘pedagogical spaces’ in which oppositional Discourses and practices can be critically and reflexively examined and, in turn, ways of understanding be negotiated.

## CHAPTER 6

### STUDENT VOICE IN UNIVERSITY CLASSROOMS – UN/AVAILABLE DISCOURSES AND NARRATIVES

**Spaces have to be created where uncomfortable questions can be asked and tentative ideas explored without the continual fear of failure that often dominates academic life. One of the major roles of academic or educational development can be seen as to provide such intellectual spaces (Rowland, 2002).**

**Rowland, 2003, p.25**

- 1 Taking up a subject position implies being actively engaged in making meaning**

*Us standing there and suddenly changing and sitting down, now somebody standing in front of us.*

*James, Focus group discussion, p.14*

As argued in chapter four *Gaps in perceptions of ‘appropriateness’ and language ‘competence’* and chapter five *‘Contribution’ – a contested practice in the university*, some of the gaps that appear to exist between the students’ and their lecturers’ expectations and perceptions of the teaching and learning on MA courses in ELT or TESOL result from hidden and often ‘naturalised’ (Fairclough, 1992b) assumptions and meanings that students and teachers bring to their educational encounters. Using Lea and Street’s (1997, 2000) perspectives on student writing as an analytic lens, the argument in chapter four emphasised the need to conceptualise notions of language ‘competence’ and ‘appropriateness’ of language use as ‘ideological’ (Street, 1984) and as embedded in discourses (Foucault, 1980; Gee, 1996). Drawing on Gee’s (1996) notion of contested terms

and Street's (2000) concept of literacy practices, chapter five discussed the literacy practice of contribution as a social and, hence, contested practice. The argument suggested explanations and patterns to the ways in which students construct their, and their lecturers', expectations of what it means to 'make a contribution' in a higher education classroom.

The argument made in chapter six focuses on the ways in which the individual interviews which I conducted with the participant MA students and the focus group discussion opened up spaces for the students to reflect on their insights and experiences in relation to their social and cultural identity positions and the social relationships they are part of in their learning and teaching contexts. The analysis and discussion in this section draws on Peirce's (1989) concept of social positionings, as discussed in chapter two (section six). It appears that the students in this case study were not always given space on their MA courses to offer and develop their contributions for further discussion and debate in their classrooms (see chapter four and chapter five). However, when the MA students were given space as participants in this case study to share their experience and perceptions and to raise concerns and questions that mattered to them, they generously offered not only their time but were keen to contribute their professional insights and concerns. As the following extract from the focus group discussion shows, they also narrated some of the ambiguities that being not 'just' students creates. James, the focus group moderator, referred to 'the fact that we are professionals and experienced' when he instigated a discussion by pointing to the ways in which the students' complex identity positions as students *and* practitioners generate not just awareness of their professional expertise but may also trigger feelings of anxiety:



James: The fact that we are professionals and experienced, and when we come to this course, [...] it is that background of being professionals that imposes more sort of fear and worry about how we are going to be evaluated. [...] I was just wondering [...] what in this background of professionalism sort of imposes these uncertainties and worry in terms of how the lecturers see us now. Is it because perhaps of our experiences also in testing, and evaluation, us standing there and suddenly changing and sitting down, now somebody standing in front of us.

Linda: It's exactly that from my experience really. [...]

(Focus group discussion, pp.14-15, to be continued below)

The observations made by James and Linda (above) and, as we will see below, by Alison, John and Rachael suggest that they are all aware of the different 'subject positions' (Peirce, 1989, p.404) they take up in classrooms, either as teachers or as students. As Peirce asserts,

the discourses of the classroom [...] are implicated in relations of power within which participants take up different subject positions, positions that are constituted by language (1989, p.405; see also chapter two, section six ).

This view of 'the discourses of the classroom' ties in with Gee (1996) who asserts that discourses with a capital 'D' are 'always more than just language' (1996, p.127; see also chapter two, section seven). As James' words vividly explain, the ways in which he feels the 'discourses of the classroom' have positioned and re-positioned him in his experience as teacher and student. The discourses of 'testing, and evaluation', which he is very familiar with as a teacher, had put him in a position of authority and power: 'standing there' in his class. On his MA course,

however, this position had been ‘suddenly changing’ and forcing him to take up a different subject position as a student ‘sitting down’ with ‘somebody standing in front’. James’ description illuminates how the ‘discourses of the classroom’ are ‘implicated in relations of power’. Linda, who agreed with his account in the focus group discussion went on to describe her giving tests to her students and then added: ‘So the same thing applies to me, being a professional [but now a student = MH], I find that other professionals [i.e. her lecturers on the MA course = MH] do the same as I [...] practise with my students. Hence this uncertainty (Linda, Focus group discussion, p.15)’. Like James she describes her changed subject position from being a teacher, a ‘professional’, to being a student which gives her less control over what happens on the course and ‘hence this uncertainty’. Alison’s, John’s and Rachael’s contributions (below) continue the focus group discussion (see extracts above):

Alison: Maybe as professionals, we think that naturally a higher standard should be seen in us, but then if we fail to really meet the standard that the lecturers expect from us, then that's a problem. [...] But then because they feel that you are a professional teacher, you've gone through some kind of qualification, then they think that you ought to be somewhere, and they expect your language to be at a particular standard; and that is where [...] people often think that as professionals their work should be [...] of a certain standard.

John: Well, I think that it's also a question of after a long time being away from being at the receiving end of education, suddenly you are a student again [...]. Also it takes a while to be humble in a way, [...] I came maybe with a certain arrogance that I know something, I have experience, you know, they can't treat me like this. But actually [...] to be humble enough also to receive criticism can be quite difficult sometimes for some people.

It was for me in the beginning, but then I began to value it when I thought it was constructive, and they weren't just putting me down, but sometimes it felt like you were just being, you know, people just putting me down [...].

Rachael: Hmm, without knowing about your experience.

John: Yeah.

(Focus group discussion continued, p.15)

Alison's contribution also ties in with Peirce's analysis of the ways in which the discourses of the classroom are constitutive of 'subject positions' of teachers and students. On the one hand, Alison feels that 'naturally a higher standard should be seen in us'. She appears to accept such high expectations because 'you are a professional teacher'. On the other hand, she appears to be concerned that her 'language' and her 'work' as a student might be subjected to somewhat unjust higher expectations because 'they feel that you are a professional teacher'. Through this analysis of the ways in which the discourses of the classroom constitute relationships of power, a pattern emerges of students such as James, Linda and Alison struggling to reconcile their changed and changing subject positions with their own and their lecturers' expectations. As Peirce (1989) explains:

Taking up a subject position implies that the subject – the person – is actively engaged in making meaning of his or her life, but is nevertheless constrained by the regulating norms of the discourse in question. When participants cannot find subject positions for themselves within a particular discourse, they may be silenced, or they may attempt to contest or challenge the dominant discourse (Peirce, 1989, p.405).



Peirce's words are repeated here (see also chapter two, section six) to show that John, feeling 'they can't treat me like this', it would appear, did 'attempt to contest or challenge the dominant discourse'. Positioning himself on an equal footing with his teachers, valuing his experience and knowledge, he felt that he 'came maybe with a certain arrogance': 'I know something, I have experience'. However, this position of 'knowing something' appears to have been challenged when he had to learn to 'receive criticism' which, although difficult, he 'began to value when (he) thought it was constructive, and they weren't just putting (him) down'. Peirce's notion of 'taking up a subject position' speaks to and helps illuminate John's way of positioning himself as being equal with his lecturers. Taking up this subject position, 'actively' impacts on his making meaning of his and his lecturers' ways of constructing the 'discourses of the classroom' (Peirce, 1989, p.405; see above) and the relations of power that those discourses establish. Similar to James (above), John felt he had suddenly changed position to being a student again after he had been away for a long time, from 'the receiving end'. His notion of 'the receiving end of education' suggests a model of teaching where, in Harry's words (chapter five, section five), 'you are imparting knowledge'. As Harry pointed out in his second interview: 'I don't think [...] I could bring anything to this course, or that I can offer anything to this course, because in the end we'll be assessed on how much you've learned, yeah? (cited in chapter five)'. It seems that, in Peirce's words, Harry felt 'constrained by the regulating norms of the discourse in question'. Harry, like John, felt the discourses of teaching and assessment that he had encountered on his MA course positioned him 'at the receiving end of education'. As discussed in chapter four, section four, such models of teaching, learning and assessment repress the 'rhetorical agency'



(Geisler, 1995, p.116) that, it would appear, some of the MA students came to develop on their Master's courses (see discussion below).

## 2 Nurturing spaces for self-development

*I mean if you have been a teacher, and you've come here to further your studies to do an MA, I see no reason why you shouldn't feel this is a course that has to do with self-development.*

*Alison, 2nd interview, p.13*

As discussed above (see also chapter one, section five), the MA students in this case study do not see themselves as 'just' students. They see themselves as professionals in their own right and as insiders to educational issues and concerns. Linda, for example, if she 'hadn't come to the MA course, this would have been (her) tenth year of teaching (Focus group discussion, p.4)'. As she so poignantly said (quoted in chapter five, section six): 'Much as we are students, we are teachers'. It appears, however, that their actual Master's programmes did not incorporate spaces for debate and reflection on issues of their subject positions as students *and* as teachers/professionals and connected concerns about relationships of power and control in learning and teaching contexts. The students' insights, views and perspectives were often treated both by lecturers and students as cultural or educational 'background' *and kept in the background* rather than made the focus of 'genuine dialogue' (see chapter five '*Contribution*' – *a contested practice in the university*). Such dialogue would be embedded in views of teaching as social rather than neutral (Peirce, 1989; see chapter five, section seven) and views of language as dialogic, or 'intertextual' (Bakhtin, 1981; see also chapter two, section seven), and 'ideological' rather than fixed and autonomous.

As argued in chapter five, it would appear that the MA students in this case study were looking for such spaces for dialogue aimed at developing their ‘rhetorical agency’ and at making their contributions not just heard but count.

The MA students found that ‘background’, if discussed, did not bring to the fore and debate meanings of language and learning as contested so that their own and their tutors’ contextual ways of understanding often remained hidden.

Furthermore, Linda, for example, felt that ‘things were just left suspended’ (see chapter four, section three). Blanche adds another telling example in her comment ‘I never would have thought it that way’ (discussed in chapter four, section four).

In her second interview Blanche explains that, having been an ESL teacher in North America, she was concerned that her ‘students really did sort of, if I can use the old cliché, slip through the cracks, I knew that was happening’ and she ‘didn’t know what to do about it’ (Blanche, 2nd interview, p.6). But for many of her fellow MA students, particularly those who had worked for English language services overseas, ‘for them English language teaching is not what it is to me’ (see chapter four). Blanche’s observation further illuminates the point that meanings are contextual and socially situated – related, for instance, to different ‘background’ experiences of this kind - but also reminds us again that such hidden meanings were not picked up by her tutors and unpacked in classroom debates.

Like Linda and Blanche, Alison was interested in ‘genuine dialogue’ with her tutors and fellow MA students that would explore professional issues, as the following extracts from her second interview will demonstrate. The first extract explores further a comment that Alison had made in her first interview:

MH: You were also saying a course like this 'is more along the lines of self-development'. Why do you think that some people don't realise this?

Alison: I don't know, maybe they don't know the reason why they have come on this course, [...] I mean if you have been a teacher, and you've come here to further your studies to do an MA, I see no reason why you shouldn't feel this is a course that has to do with self-development, where you have to try and improve on your abilities such that when you go back into the profession, you maybe have something that you can use to improve on your shortcomings. [...]

(Alison, 2nd interview, p.13)

For Alison, the MA course 'is a course that has to do with self-development'.

Similar to Linda (above), much as she feels she is a student, she is a teacher who has come to 'further (her) studies' and 'improve on (her) abilities' to take 'back into the profession'. This broader view of learning and teaching is also highlighted in the following extract:

MH: You were saying in your first interview that you would have wanted to gain more 'in terms of human relationships'. Now, in what ways do you think you could have achieved this?

Alison: I think one way in which maybe I could have achieved this, if the lecturers themselves appreciated this in a course such as the one that we are doing, but it seems like it's their least priority, you know. They just see us as a bunch of learners who have come to learn for a particular period of time, and after that time we go away.

(Alison, 2nd interview, p.13)



Taking a social view of learning and teaching, Alison makes a connection between the MA course being about 'self-development' and about 'human relationships'. This link, which her lecturers appear to fail to see - 'it seems like it's their last priority' - highlights again the pattern that we have seen above (section one) of the students' awareness of the way in which they suddenly on the MA course found themselves positioned as students or, in Alison's words, found that they were seen as 'a bunch of learners' who 'after a particular period of time [...] will go away'. Such positionings are constitutive of 'the discourses of the classroom' (Peirce, 1989), and vice versa. Peirce's assertion, as discussed in section one, that 'taking up a subject position implies that the subject [...] is actively engaged in making meaning (1989, p.405)' can help illuminate the discrepancy between the lecturers' perceptions of the MA students as 'a bunch of learners' and Alison's perception of herself as a professional who associates her being a student with self-development as a professional teacher. Alison took this point up again later in her interview, when I asked her the same question that I asked all the participant MA students towards the end of their second interview about what it is that they had wanted from the course and what it is they thought they could achieve:

Alison: Well, as I was saying from a course such as this, really, I would have loved to gain some kind of self-development in terms of my career, and then I should say it hasn't really done that much as far as that is concerned, and whatever I have achieved out of this course I still really have to wait until maybe I get into the real world to know whether really it has been of any help to me, so really practice will prove when I get back home whether I really gained much out of this course.

(Alison, 2nd interview, p.15)



Alison, it seems, is frustrated that what she ‘would have loved to gain’ *on* her MA course, namely ‘self-development’, might now have to wait until *after* she gets ‘into the real world’. She has come to conclude that ‘practice will prove when (she gets) back home’ whether she has achieved her aim of self-development. In other words, it appears that Alison’s quest for ‘self-development’, a discourse that positions herself as a professional, could not be reconciled with the discourse of lecturers who position their students as ‘a bunch of learners’. The following interview extract takes this analysis further by locating the issue of self-development *on* rather than after the MA course:

MH: You were [...] talking about improvement of the self on a course like this. In what ways could there be made room for improvement of the self of the people who come to a course like this?

Alison: Hmm, [...] say if you have a tutor, and then you talk about problems that have to do with your teaching context, and then you try and work on the best possible ways of trying to solve what you think are the problems to do with the classroom in your own context, then that would help.

(Alison, 2nd interview, p.14)

Alison here firmly ties her concern about ‘improvement of the self’ to her looking for space to discuss with her tutors her ‘teaching context’ and ‘problems to do with the classroom in (her) own context’. For Alison, the issue of self-development is an issue of context. It appears that this perspective on issues of studying on a Master’s course is in line with Lea and Street’s (2000) academic literacies perspective, which asserts the interconnectedness of issues of teaching

and learning in higher education with ‘the whole institutional and epistemological context’ (2000, p.33; see also chapter five, section one). Alison’s purpose of ‘self-development’ and the students’ concern for their contributions and expertise to be taken seriously also resonates with Rowland’s (2002) assertion that ‘lecturers’ purposes, and their students’, may not always be reconcilable. But they should be articulated (Rowland, 2002, p.56)’. The students’ concerns with self-development, context and contribution (see also chapter five), if taken seriously, could change the nature of discussions of ‘background’ to debates on how institutional and epistemological contexts shape the discourses of the classroom and the subject positions of those involved in educational encounters (see also chapter seven). The discussion in this chapter does not offer ‘findings’ (see also discussion of related methodological concerns in chapter three, section one *Constructing the study*) but takes the discussion that I initiated with the students one step further, offering my analysis and interpretations which can be taken up and taken further, or rejected, through further discussions and debates of issues this study raises.

### **3 The research space – taking up the students’ contributions**

*You need people who can tell you exactly what is it that you want to investigate.*

*Alison, 2nd interview, p.1*

The analysis and discussion in this chapter will focus on and expose some of the ‘tension between university teachers’ and their students’ perceptions about each other’s purposes’ (Rowland, 2002, p.55; as cited in chapter one). The MA students’ insights both as students and as professionals, their concerns and questions are being used as analytical tools that can help bring to light gaps

between lecturers' agendas of what is to be learnt and what can be known and the agendas that students may bring, consciously or unconsciously, to their learning. Taking the students' professional expertise seriously can help formulate steps towards learning and teaching agendas that are jointly constructed through 'genuine dialogue' rather than institutionally imposed. The analysis then, while drawing on the MA students' professional insights and understandings, also takes account - from a researcher's perspective - of Hewlett's (1996, p.98) call for teachers to 'consider the implications of overprivileging students' voices and of not challenging them to examine the assumptions underlying their own discourses'. As Lather (1991) argues,

teachers become providers of language codes of varying complexities as they create pedagogical spaces where students can enter a world of oppositional knowledge and negotiate definitions and ways of perceiving (Bowers 1987). Our pedagogical responsibility then becomes to nurture this space where students can come to see ambivalence and difference not as an obstacle, but as the very richness of meaning making and the hope of whatever justice we might work toward (Lather, 1991, p.101).

The research interviews that I conducted for this study were set up as 'research spaces', and not intended to be pedagogical spaces of the kind Lather and Hewlett envisage, where lecturers (teachers) and students can expose oppositional narratives, negotiate ways of understanding but also critically examine their discourses and practices. However, I had created and was nurturing such spaces in the individual interviews and, more significantly in the focus group discussion (see section four below). In other words, the research tools themselves indicate the kind of pedagogical function that ensues from Peirces's concept of subject position and Lather's notion of teachers as 'providers of language codes of



varying complexities' which make possible critical analysis and debate (see also chapter seven, section four).

The analysis then builds on Peirce's understanding that the discourses of the classroom are implicated in the ways in which teachers and students are positioned and position themselves as students *and* professionals in their learning and teaching encounters. The analysis thus far has shown a pattern of the MA students wanting to contribute to their MA classes their ways of talking which they brought from their own professional contexts. They want to examine the institutional and epistemological meanings that underpin the teaching and learning on their MA courses but also adapt the 'genres' of their fields to their local meanings and uses in order to 'improve' their own ways of doing. Such an approach would enable them to 'take hold' (Street and Street, 1991, p.146) of the social practices that are constitutive of the discourses and the subject positions they take on in the classroom. However, this purpose of 'taking hold' of the literacy practices and discourses of the classroom and of self-development as professionals appears to be in contrast with the purpose of at least some of the MA course lecturers as perceived by their students. As discussed in section one above (see also chapter five), the students saw their tutors 'imparting knowledge' rather than allowing them to 'discover things for themselves' that are relevant to them. The students' inclination to *take hold* of the genres of their professional fields rather than acquire the knowledge imparted by their tutors appears to be in line with Luke's (1996a) critical examination of the Australian 'genre' approaches to



disciplinary knowledges in *Genres of power? Literacy education and the production of capital*. Drawing on Lee's (1993) criticism of the genre model, Luke (1996a) argues that

its emphasis on the direct transmission of text types does not necessarily lead on to a critical reappraisal of that disciplinary corpus, its field or its related institutions, but rather may lend itself to an uncritical reproduction of discipline [*sic*] (Luke, 1996a, p.314).

Such a critical understanding of the notion of disciplinary 'genre' can help further illuminate the ways in which students and teachers are implicated in the reproduction of disciplinary fields such as English language and literacy education. It also ties in with Street's (1993) concept of 'culture as a verb', adopted by Ivanič (1998) in her study of *Writing and identity: The discoursal construction of identity in academic writing*. Ivanič writes:

'culture' is not a thing but a verb: the constant interaction of competing systems of values, beliefs, practices, norms, conventions and relations of power which have been shaped by the socio-political history of a nation or an institution in the interests of privileged members of it. There is a strong pressure in any cultural context to conform to dominant values, beliefs and practices, as they appear to be the means of achieving social, and often financial, gain, although they usually reinforce the status and serve the interests of the privileged few. However, the systems of values, practices and beliefs, and the patterns of privileging among them are not fixed, but open to contestation and change (Street in Ivanič, 1998, p.42).

Those systems of values, practices and beliefs and the patterns of privileging among them underpin oppositional knowledge and 'genres' of disciplinary fields. If, as Lather argues (see section two above), our aim in teaching and learning is to live up to our 'pedagogical responsibility' to create and nurture spaces in which teachers and students can expose and negotiate oppositional Discourses and

practices of their fields, our aim in educational research would be to take responsibility to create spaces in which we can explore and be critical of ‘the discourses of power and the relations that shape and maintain those discourses’ (Hewlett, 1996, p.98). The following interview extract shows that Alison appreciated the interview space that I had created for this study but also that she actively and responsibly claimed this space to ‘make whatever contributions she can’:

I think I understand what the study is all about, and maybe to some extent I appreciate it, and somehow I believe that one way or the other I have to make whatever contributions I can, if I can be of any help to the study.  
(Alison, 2nd interview, p.1)

Answering my question on how she saw her role in the interviews, she goes further:

You need people who can tell you exactly what is it that you want to investigate. (Alison, 2nd interview, p.1)

In his introduction to Hymes (1996) *Ethnography, Linguistics, Narrative Inequality: Toward an Understanding of Voice*, Luke (1996b) emphasised as crucial the ‘matter of “uptake” of speakers’ narratives by researchers, teachers and institutions’ (Luke, 1996b, viii). Alison, it seems, feels strongly that she has things to say that matter to her which I should ‘take up’ and ‘investigate’ in this case study.

#### 4      **The pedagogical space – creating and enhancing the climate for learning**

*If our teachers had been there, they would have been surprised, because it was something that, referring to the classes, there had been that feeling that they had nothing to say. We were there as moderators but they were speaking to one another.*

*Focus group moderator, notes p.2*

Some of the quotes that follow have been used to link the students' insights to broader theoretical discussions in previous chapters. The students' comments are revisited here as together they help further develop the argument that the research space created in the interviews and focus group discussion also had an impact on the students' adjustment to and evaluation of their MA programmes, thus generating a pedagogical intervention in their learning experience. Blanche, for example, felt after her first interview that 'seeing more coherence in what (she) said than (she) originally thought there was' and 'being able to talk through things and share things' helped her build her confidence (see chapter three, section five). Similarly, Rachael pointed out: 'It makes you think more than you are made to think in most of the lectures, you are given the opportunity to try to articulate things' (see also chapter three). This section then argues that the interviews and, more significantly, the focus group discussion did not just have a research function but were also of pedagogical value to the participant MA students and thus points to implications of this study for pedagogy in MA classrooms.

James, the focus group moderator, shared the following observations with me after I had shared with him the transcript of the focus group discussion:



James: As some of them were saying: ‘It’s like a breathing space’. [...] They’ve had things to say, but they had never had a chance to say them before. [...] The people that came did feel it was something meaningful to them. At some stage we had to stop, it could have gone on. The fact that people were speaking what came from inside – it was not something artificial as our group activities are. [...] If our teachers had been there, they would have been surprised, because it was something that, referring to the classes, there had been that feeling that they had nothing to say. [...] We were there as moderators, but they were speaking to one another.

MH: How would you explain the difference for people being silent in class, but speaking up here?

James: The topic made sense to them, it related to them, it wasn’t something they were doing to impress somebody. [...] There was no assessment in terms of: you performed better than others. Because the whole thing of being judged, looked at, my intelligence being questioned in terms of how I speak was not there, and people just went on. [...]

MH: [...] Would you say that focus group discussions can be of value within education, within the educational process?

James: It was very different to a one-to-one conversation, because people would sit back and reflect on what other people were saying. There was a lot of sharing, and a sense of belonging.

(Focus group moderator, notes on moderating, pp.2-3)

In James’s terms, the focus group discussion afforded the students a ‘breathing space’, a space where they could speak without fear of being judged or their ‘intelligence being questioned in terms of how (they) speak’. In other words, they knew that *what* they were saying was important. In his view, the students who participated in the focus group discussion appreciated that what they had to say



mattered and that they could be sure that I would *take up* what they were saying. While James and myself had been there as moderators, James observed that the students were ‘speaking to one another’, they were ‘speaking what came from inside’ and taking each other up on their points. In other words, they were nurturing the space that the focus group discussion had created in such a way that they would not just listen, reflect and contribute to the discussion but experience ‘a lot of sharing’ and, thereby, nurture a ‘sense of belonging’. It would appear, then, that the way the students contributed to shaping the focus group discussion can be seen to be indicative of the way they would have liked to be involved in seminars and classroom discussions on their MA course. As James put it, in response to my question about the educational value of focus group discussions, they ‘would sit back and reflect on what other people were saying’. In Lather’s (1991) terms (see discussion above), the students were entering each other’s worlds of experience, knowledge and understanding and negotiating ways of perceiving; they came ‘to see ambivalence and difference not as an obstacle, but as the very richness of meaning making and the hope of whatever justice we might work toward’.

As this case study has demonstrated thus far, lecturers did not always take up or encourage the contributions that students made, or could have made, in classroom debates. For example, the lecturer in Alison’s class ‘brushed aside’ her question about the use of English to teach Setswana (see chapter five, section six). Thus, Alison and the other participant MA students appreciated the space that this case study created for them to ‘talk through things and share things’ (Blanche, see discussion above) and to ‘try to articulate things’ (Rachael, see above). Rowland

(2003) likewise argues, albeit based on research ‘in the school sector’ (p.21), from a lecturer’s and professor’s point of view that

intellectual struggle cannot be reduced to predictable outcomes, however politically and administratively convenient this might be. Much research through the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s [...] demonstrated that a curriculum is a much more complex and unpredictable affair [...]: more *dependent upon what the learners contribute* to the process (Rowland, 2003, pp.20-21, my emphasis).

Rowland takes up this educational debate that started forty years ago and reminds us in the 21st century that

learning [...] is inevitably a struggle to create, maintain and enhance the climate for learning. That struggle is a fundamental part of learning itself, not merely an unfortunate condition to be resolved *before* learning can take place (Rowland, 2003, p.14; his emphasis).

Rowland’s assertions further develop the pedagogical argument made in this chapter and, indeed, the whole thesis. The participant students’ desire for self-development *on* their MA courses by bringing their own professional contexts to their classrooms is in line with Rowland’s argument that the struggle of learning takes place *in* actual learner/student and teacher/lecturer encounters where learning is ‘dependent upon what the learners contribute’. The analysis thus far has demonstrated that the participant MA students wanted to offer their insights, questions and difficulties as invaluable contributions to learning. Rowland’s notion that learning entails ‘intellectual struggle’ and that a curriculum cannot be premeditated ‘*before* learning can take place’ and then ‘imparted’ to students (see also chapter five, section five) also tie in with Hewlett’s (1996) point that ‘fragmented, content-heavy curricula [...] work against collaborative learning and

a holistic focus on student development' (1996, p.98). In other words, not only do set and solely 'curriculum'-driven teaching agendas impede student development, they also work against teacher development or 'staff development', to use the rhetoric of institutional concerns about CDP (continuous staff development). The remainder of this chapter will address the implications that arise from such an argument and the findings of this case study for pedagogical practice on MA courses in English language teaching, while chapter seven *Cycles of adjustment – a reflexive look back and ahead* will self-reflexively discuss implications of this study for teacher development, including my own development as a student-cum-researcher-cum-lecturer.

## **5 Narrative as a form of knowledge in university classrooms**

*I have realized that other people can afford to have situations in their country debated when maybe they are not of interest to us, but because they are vocal and they always have their way followed, they can afford to have that done for them.*

*Alison, 2nd interview, p.11*

Previously discussed in chapter four (section four) in the context of *Data collection*, it is useful to remind the reader of Fairclough's and Wodak's (1997) assertion that 'interpretations and explanations are never finished and authoritative' but are 'open to new contexts and new information (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997, p.279)'. This case study then conceptualises the MA students' experiences not as 'finished and authoritative' but asserts through its analyses that meanings and interpretations are constructed, contextual and contested. As we have seen, the MA course lecturers may not always encourage students'



contributions. Equally, students may not always feel that they can make a contribution or raise their questions within the framework that their lecturers provide. One context in which such framing and questioning became possible for the students in this study turned out to be the focus group session I set up as part of the research, in which students shared their experiences and ‘narrative knowledge’ (Hymes, 1996). The focus group data show that the students in this study were not just willing to participate in this study but keen and highly capable to analyse and reflect on their experience and contribute their knowledge. Hymes argues that narrative forms of knowledge, although widely devalued and marginalised in academic contexts, are in fact as analytic as currently privileged and sanctioned forms of knowledge. He writes:

We tend to depreciate narrative as a form of knowledge, and personal narrative particularly, in contrast to other forms of discourse considered scholarly, scientific, technical, or the like (Hymes, 1996, p.112).

As James’s observed (see section four above), during the focus group discussion the students were able to speak because they felt that their knowledge and what they had to say mattered in the context of the study or, as Alison put it, she felt she knew and could ‘tell exactly’ (see section three above) what I wanted to investigate. When I opened the focus group discussion, I shared with the students my methodological understanding that in coming to the focus group discussion they had taken on a different role in making a contribution to this study:



In the beginning you [...] didn't have much chance to opt out of your groups. I just came into your classes and I was there kind of observing what was going on, so there was not much chance to say 'I don't want that'. But the fact that you have decided to talk to me in the interviews, and the fact that you have come today, I think gives you a different role, a different chance to talk about your insight into these courses, because my research is starting exactly there, it is starting from your insights.

(Monika, Focus Group Discussion, p.1)

It was my own experience of being a Master's student prior to this PhD study and my insight that such spaces for reflection and debate were not available on the MA course that had prompted me to set up a focus group discussion as a space for the students to share their backgrounds and experiences and the knowledge they had constructed from those contexts. In other words, the students entered the research space that this study created for the purpose of data collection but they also shared their *narratives as forms of knowledge*. The analysis and discussion thus far has shown that the participant MA students were confident that what they had to say mattered and was relevant to this study. In the focus group the students were 'speaking to one another' (James, above), as Linda's, Alison's, John's and Rachael's discussion in the focus group (see section one above) demonstrate. (See also chapter three, section seven for a discussion of the *interactive* nature of the focus group data.)

This section then, drawing on Hymes' (1996) concept of 'narratives to explore and convey knowledge' (1996, p.109), extends the analysis in this chapter and discusses the role of narrative as form of knowledge in

creating and defining pedagogical spaces that build on students' contributions and enable them to enter and debate each other's contextual experiences, knowledges and meanings. In his chapter *Narrative Thinking and Storytelling Rights: A Folklorist's Clue to a Critique of Education*, Hymes (1996) explores 'narrative' as opposed to 'non-narrative' ways of sharing knowledge, drawing on accounts from participants in a women's group, recorded by Joanne Bromberg-Ross, and graduate and undergraduate students, reported by Courtney Cazden when he 'urged her to write them up' (Hymes, 1996, p.109). Hymes demonstrates contrasts and differences in ways of speaking in university classrooms. Cazden's account is based on her teaching a course to 'two different student groups: two mornings a week to a class of graduate students (master's and doctoral level) at Harvard Graduate School of Education, and one evening later in the week as a double lecture to a class in Harvard University Extension (Hymes, 1996, p.110)'. She explains that 'each class knew of the other's existence' and that students had been 'encouraged to switch when convenient' (p.110) and reports that one evening one of two black students from the Graduate School who had joined the evening Extension group 'spoke publicly about his perceptions of the difference in the two classes'. Paraphrasing his comments, Cazden (in Hymes, 1996, pp.110-112) cites the student who observed:

In the morning class, people who raise their hand talk about some article that the rest of us haven't read. That shuts us out. Here people talk from their personal experience. It's a more human environment (Graduate student quoted by Cazden in Hymes, 1996, p.110).

Cazden then provides a similar account given to her by an Alaskan woman graduate student, this time ‘the contrast was not only between ways of speaking, but how these ways were differentially acknowledged by the professor’ (p.110). Cazden, again paraphrasing, cites the students’ comment:

When someone, even an undergraduate, raises a question that is based on what some authority says, Prof X says ‘That’s a great question!’, expands on it, and incorporates it into her following comments. But when people like me talk from our personal experience, our ideas are not acknowledged. The professor may say, ‘Hm-hm’, and then proceed as if we hadn’t been heard (Cazden in Hymes, 1996, p.111).

Cazden concludes that, similar to the Warm Springs Indian children in Susan Philip’s (1983) study of classroom participation, the students’ accounts demonstrate that their contributions to class discussions did not ‘get the floor’ (Philips, 1983) when they were based on narratives of personal experience. These accounts of Cazden’s students of contrasts in ways of speaking and ways of ‘uptake’ (Luke, 1996b, viii; see also section three this chapter) of their classroom contributions by their professors resonate markedly with the MA students’ observations and accounts in this case study. As discussed above, students had noted that ‘things were just left suspended’ (Linda, section two) and that some of their questions were not taken up but ‘brushed aside’ (Alison, section four) when they were drawing on their own professional experiences to make a point. However, it has to be noted here that it is a limitation of this study that the analysis cannot be substantiated further from data gained through recorded classroom interaction, a limitation of this study which will be addressed in chapter seven.



The following extract from Alison's second interview looks further at the issue of *uptake* as Alison explores why her lecturer might not have acknowledged and developed her contribution in class:

Alison: Maybe it's because it came from somebody who would just say something very briefly and keep quiet, maybe if it was somebody different, they would have even said more after somebody said so, they would have gone on and on without being asked more, and it could have been an issue of debate, because that is what I have realized that other people can afford to have situations in their country debated when maybe they are not of interest to us, but because they are vocal and they always have their way followed, they can afford to have that done for them.  
(Alison, 2nd interview, p.11)

Alison here links the issue of the question she had raised in class to the way she feels her lecturers saw her contribution as coming 'from somebody who would just say something very briefly and keep quiet'. She appears to feel strongly that if the contribution had come from 'somebody different', the point she raised 'could have been an issue of debate'. Alison concluded that 'other people can afford to have situations in their country debated [...] because they are vocal'. Alison's analysis provides a key point in the argument made here: if students want their lecturers to 'follow their ways' and to acknowledge the issues they raise, students need to be 'vocal' *in a certain way*. While this point cannot be substantiated further based on recorded classroom data, Alison's observation and experience of her lecturer saying 'Right, let's move on then' (see also chapter five, section six) can be said to be strikingly similar to the account of Cazden's student (above) who observed that 'when people like me' speak in class



and talk from their experience, the professor would not take up their ideas but instead might say ‘Hm-hm’ and ‘then proceed *as if we hadn’t been heard*’ (my emphasis). Hymes’ (1996) concludes that narrative ways of clarifying meaning, as in talk from personal experience or in stories, are of lower status in university classrooms than non-narrative ways, as in talk ‘based on what some authority says’ (Alaskan woman student, cited above). Alison’s analysis then provides further evidence together with Cazden’s students’ accounts that *certain ways of being vocal* are being recognised and encouraged in university classrooms while others are devalued and undermined. In line with Hymes then, this section argues that students’ narratives are forms of knowledge that have equal analytic value as other, currently privileged, scholarly forms of knowledge. While students’ narratives may not be taken up by their lecturers, Hymes (1996) observes that professors indeed do take up each other’s narratives and make them heard in their lectures:

what many of us know about our subject comes in part from conversations with colleagues, from the stories they have told us, not from reading and evaluating published works. And from those accepted as co-members of the profession we do not discount verbal interest and effect. Indeed, we may relish it, if the result is a good story that makes a point with which we agree. We pay it a compliment by introducing it into our lectures (Hymes, 1996, p.115).

Hymes here provides a valuable insight into university classroom practices from a professor’s perspective, which enables us to examine his and the students’ accounts, cited above, in the light of the social view of discourse (Foucault, 1980; Gee 1996, Fairclough 1992c; Pierce 1989; Weedon 1997) that underpins this case

study. As outlined in chapter two (section seven *Language has meaning only in and through practices*), language and ways of speaking need to be understood as constitutive of subject positions (Peirce 1989; see also section this chapter) and social relationships of those who participate, or are expected to participate, in literacy practices (Street, 1997; 2000; see also chapter five, section two). While the MA students' and Cazden's students' experience that their lecturers tend to not take up their verbal contributions for further debate in seminars and lectures, Hymes asserts here that lecturers take up conversational contributions, made outside classrooms, 'from those accepted as co-members of the profession' and introduce them 'into (their) lectures'. In other words, Hymes connects the way in which lecturers 'relish' taking up their colleagues' accounts in their own lectures to their social and professional status and knowledge: 'what many of us know about our subject comes in part from conversations with colleagues, from the stories they have told us, not from reading and evaluating published works'.

Hymes's insight is grounded in his argument that there is an 'interdependence between two different modes of clarifying meaning (1996, p.109)', namely narrative modes, such as personal conversations with colleagues, and non-narrative modes, such as discussions of terms and evaluations of research papers. He asserts that narrative forms of knowledge are as analytic and constitutive of academic discourses and practices as more conventional 'analytic' discussions of terms and concepts from published works. According to Hymes then, narrative forms of knowledge appear to be taken up only if they can be attributed to 'accepted co-members' of the academic community. It follows from this discussion that the graduate students in Cazden's morning class 'who raise their

hand to talk about some article' (see above) were not just successful in 'taking the floor' and making their contributions heard, they were also, it seems, successful in being accepted as members of the community. It is significant that the student also observed that, at the same time, that kind of talking about some article 'that the rest of us haven't read [...] shuts us out'. In other words, the students who were 'shut out' were, in fact, not accepted as 'co-members of the profession'. In contrast, in Cazden's evening class 'people talk from their personal experience'. Although Cazden was in control of the class, she and the students nevertheless created a 'more human environment' as they operated as co-members of the class, admitting and debating narrative knowledge.

In contrast to Cazden's students, it appears that in some classes in this case study students were seen 'as a bunch of learners' (Alison, see section two above) and that students were not always successful in making themselves heard as 'accepted co-members' of the profession. In Alison's second interview, she and I explored her having decided to 'resign' herself, 'let the game be their game', because 'it ends up like "the course is for certain people"'. Responding to my question: 'What would you want to do yourself, and what would you want others to do in order to make the course be for everybody?', Alison said:

I think what I meant by that statement was that [...] if maybe there is a sort of open environment where people can talk and not being intimidated by other people in class, then that would be everybody's course.

(Alison, 2nd interview, p.6)



Alison's response at that point in her interview was also going back to a comment she had made earlier in the interview:

I think if we want to help other people to participate more in lessons, we should try to create an atmosphere that is conducive to that.

(Alison, 2nd interview, p.3)

Alison, as we can see, wanted her course to be 'for everybody' but did not see that happening as there was not necessarily an 'atmosphere that was conducive to that'. In her second interview, Alison further explored the question of how lecturers could take up students' contributions and draw on their contexts in terms of 'studying the individual people in the group as individuals', a point she had raised in her first interview:

MH: You were also saying [...] that lecturers should maybe 'study the individual people in the group as individuals'. How could they do this? In what ways do you think lecturers could study the individual people more?

Alison: I think [...] lecturers, what we do, we write assignments, we produce written work for them, and surely, one way or the other, they know that we have certain strengths, and somehow when it comes to maybe a lesson, they just ignore other people, you know, and just think that they have nothing that they can offer, when they know pretty well that those students when given an opportunity to speak what their ideas are, to say what their ideas are, they can do that, but they just choose sometimes not to even, should I say, even expand on what you say in class.

(Alison, 2nd interview, p.6)



Alison is disappointed that her lecturers who ‘know that (they) have certain strengths’ do not, it seems, raise the ideas that students develop in their written assignments to encourage them to enter or instigate debates in class. Lecturers do not, in Alison’s view, create spaces where students could ‘say what their ideas are’. Instead, ‘they just choose sometimes not to even [...] expand on what you say in class’. Alison’s concern is echoed by Barbara Christian (1987) who asserts that

writing disappears unless there is a response to it (Christian in Ellsworth, 1994, p.306).

Ellsworth (1994), reflecting on her own position as professor in her classrooms, writes:

My role [...] would be to interrupt institutional limits on how much time and energy students of color, White students, and professors against racism could spend on elaborating their positions [...]. With Barbara Christian, I saw the necessity to take the voices of students and professors [...] at their word – as ‘valid’ – but *not without response* (1994, p.306; my emphasis).

Both Ellsworth and Christian assert the crucial role of ‘response’ to students’ (and professors’) positions because their voice ‘disappears unless there is a response to it’, a view that appears to be in line with Luke’s (1996b, viii) emphasis on ‘uptake’, discussed here. While Alison felt her classroom contributions were not taken up by some of her lecturers, she was adamant that she could make a contribution to this study (see also section three) and that she was not ‘just’ a student (see also discussion in section one). Alison maintained:

In a course like this you hope to be in class with mature people,  
and professionals in their own right.

(Alison, 2nd interview, p.12)

Seeing herself and her fellow students as ‘mature people’ who are ‘professionals in their own right’, Alison appears to perceive herself as a *co-member* of the community of professionals and academics in her field. While in some of the MA course classrooms some of the students’ verbal contributions were brushed aside or, in Hymes’ terms, ‘dismissed as anecdotal, even where narrative might (have been) the only form in which the evidence, or voice, was available (Hymes, 1996, p.114)’, Alison would have expected her lecturers to further the MA students’ development as co-members of that community by responding to and ‘expanding on what you say in class’.

Similarly, as we have seen above, she expected me to take up and respond to the contribution she made to this case study. To me, the MA student-cum-researcher, Alison’s and the other participant MA students’ accounts provided invaluable insights of ‘co-members of the profession’ into what it means to learn to talk the talk and to do the talk of our professional fields. I have argued that the individual interviews and the focus group discussion, while being deployed to serve a research function, also became a pedagogical tool for the students’ self-development *on* the MA course. It follows from this argument that students’ narrative knowledge needs to be encouraged and given equal status to currently privileged forms of knowledge in university classrooms and thus made available to be expanded on through critical and self-reflexive examination of ‘the

assumptions underlying their own discourses (Hewlett's, 1996, p.98)', as discussed above.

## 6 Student voice: un/available discourses

*MH: You have also told me about the big things that this course has not prepared you for, like developing approaches for groups of students who don't all speak English as their first language, which is your background. What would you see as being important in thinking about such groups of students, and dealing with them?*

*Blanche: That's a really big question, it really hits, you know, right on the issue. I wish I knew, I think that's what I wanted to learn here. I know that.*  
*Blanche, 2nd interview, pp.5-6*

As the discussion of the focus group session has demonstrated, it is in pedagogical spaces of the kind that Lather suggests that students (and lecturers) can foster the self-development that the MA students in this cases study envisaged. This and the following concluding section of this chapter argue that it is crucial that lecturers (teachers, professors) take up their responsibility to create and nurture, in Lather's terms, pedagogical spaces in which students can 'enter a world of oppositional knowledge' (section two above) and thus develop their 'rhetorical agency' as co-members of their professional and academic communities. The argument made here utilises Giroux's (1989) concept of 'voice' as it enables us to establish the link between 'voice' and discourses as, in Gee's terms, ways of valuing and being in this world. According to Giroux,

the concept of voice represents the unique instances of self-expression through which students affirm their own class, cultural, racial and gender identities. A student's voice is necessarily shaped



by personal history and distinctive lived engagement with the surrounding culture. The category of voice, then, refers to the means at our disposal – *the discourses available to us* – to make ourselves understood and listened to, and to define ourselves as active participants in the world (Giroux, 1989, p.199; my emphasis).

His notion of voice then enables us to highlight the active role and responsibility of students and lecturers in developing ‘the discourses available to us’ as well as, I would argue, in pursuing the discourses *unavailable* to us. It is helpful here to also draw on Kress (discussed in chapter two, section one) who reminded us that discourses ‘define, describe, and delimit what it is possible to say and not possible to say [...]’. A discourse provides a set of possible statements about a given area, and organizes and gives structure to the manner in which a particular topic, object, process is to be talked about’. Lecturers, then, ‘define, describe, and delimit’ the ways in which students can develop their voice by making available or unavailable discourses that they can draw on. Similarly, students are responsible players in accepting or rejecting discourses and practices which may represent and legitimate the knowledges and understandings of those on ‘their home turf’ (Blanche; see chapter five, section seven).

While Giroux’s (1989) notion of student voice has been crucial in the discussion above to our understanding of voice as ‘the discourses available to us’, his notion of ‘self-expression through which students affirm their own class, cultural, racial and gender identities’ may lead to simplistic notions of students engaging as ‘active participants’ in classroom



interaction or classroom ‘dialogue’. In her discussion in *Why doesn't this feel empowering? Working through the repressive myths of critical pedagogy* (1994), Ellsworth argued with reference to Giroux and McLaren that Giroux’s ‘formula’ for dialogue

fails to confront dynamics of subordination present among classroom participants and within classroom participants in the form of multiple and contradictory subject positions (Ellsworth, 1994, p.315).

The student accounts provided in this case study can help elaborate on these more complex aspects of tutor/student interactions and ‘dialogue’. This section will bring together some of the guiding research sources and concepts that this thesis has built on, such as Peirce’s notion of ‘subject position’, Lather’s ‘oppositional knowledge’, Foucault’s concept of power, Gee’s notion of Discourses, and Lea and Street’s broad notion of institutional and epistemological contexts, which will further contribute to the theoretical understanding developed here of student voice in relation to knowledge construction and pedagogy. For instance, Ellsworth’s perspective on classroom debate is in line with Peirce’s (1989) notion of ‘subject position’ and her view that teachers ‘help to organize the way students perceive themselves and the world’ (1989, p.408; see chapter five, section seven). Ellsworth’s view that educators need to ‘confront dynamics of subordination’ as they present themselves through ‘multiple and contradictory subject positions’ of classroom participants also resonates with Pennycook’s (1994, p.133) assertion that ‘background knowledge is never an innocent way of knowing’. Ellsworth’s and

Pennycook's critical perspectives on multiple, contradictory and 'never innocent' ways of knowing also further our understanding of the notion of 'genuine dialogue' and help transfer Bakhtin's (1981) notion of language as dialogic and 'intertextual' (see chapter five, section seven) from the theoretical domain of literary analysis into the pedagogical domain. Together then, their arguments give further urgency to Lather's call for teachers to create pedagogical spaces where students can pursue and examine through critical and self-reflexive debate 'oppositional knowledge' and the discourses un/available to them. The data provided in this chapter can, I hope, help unpack what this means.

Blanche, for example, had brought a 'big question' to her course but she felt that the pedagogical forums that her MA course offered did not help her enough to develop a response to the issues that her question raises. The question I put to Blanche in her second interview made reference to professional issues, 'the big things', that she had said her MA course had not addressed:

MH: You have also told me about the big things that this course has not prepared you for, like developing approaches for groups of students who don't all speak English as their first language, which is your background. What would you see as being important in thinking about such groups of students, and dealing with them?

Blanche: That's a really big question, it really hits, you know, right on the issue. I wish I knew, I think that's what I wanted to learn here. I know that. I taught ESL for a year in North Carolina, and so many things were going on with the students, they had needs, I could see that but I didn't really know exactly what those needs

were, and also didn't know how I should best meet them. Ehm, some of my students may have had learning disabilities, or they may not have, it was really hard to tell, because unless you can test them in their best language, whatever that is, you can't know, and I was definitely not qualified to make those kinds of judgements. (Blanche, 2nd interview, pp.5-6)

As Blanche pointed out, her professional context was teaching 'groups of students who don't all speak English as their first language'. Although she had therefore been interested in 'developing approaches' for those students, on her Master's course she had not been able to develop a response to questions such as what she would see as important in thinking about such groups of students and dealing with them. For Blanche this question hit 'right on the issue' and 'that's what (she) had wanted to learn here', yet she felt she still did not have available the discourses that would have enabled her to develop her voice. Giroux's notion of voice as 'the means at our disposal – the discourses available to us' is crucial for the analysis here as it illuminates Blanche's search for the *discourses*, the ways of knowing and understanding that would enable her to explore and discuss her students' perceived 'needs'. She was aware that in order for her to further her understanding of her students' perceived 'learning disabilities' she would need more than to 'develop approaches' as she 'was definitely not qualified to make those kinds of judgements'.

Blanche felt that on her MA course she had not been able to develop a confident voice by developing the discourses that were available to her but



also, crucially, by pursuing the discourses that were still *unavailable* to her. She explores this further in the following interview extract:

Blanche: Well, I definitely need more confidence, and [...] I'm not sure if teacher training, or MA programs can give me that, but you've got to have a lot of confidence to be able to stand up in front of mainstream teachers, and say 'this is the way that you can help these students, these are their needs'. I need to know what those needs are, and I need to know how to present myself and present the needs of these children to mainstream teachers. I need to know specific techniques in classrooms, I need to be comfortable with explaining those techniques, I need to be comfortable with having groups of students who are all different English proficiency levels together for the same hour, and being able to help each one of them as best as I can.

MH: Why would you think you would need to be confident to present yourself?

Blanche: Well, I think because ESL is so marginalized in many contexts, at least it was in my context [...], I mean people just had no sensitivity to the unique needs of ESL students, I know I don't exactly know what all those needs are, but their idea was 'well, they don't need anything special, they'll pick English up', or 'anybody can teach English' [...], 'it's not my job to teach this' [...], 'that's the ESL teacher's job', [...] and I think that's why I would need confidence to sort of not be afraid to stand up in front of very experienced teachers, and share ideas and techniques with them.

(Blanche, 2nd interview, pp.6-7)

Blanche's not yet having been able to develop a confident voice and identity position as an ESL teacher ties in with Peirce (1989), who asserts that subject positions are constituted by language. According to Peirce,



‘language is not only an abstract structure, but a practice that is socially constructed (1989, p.405; see also chapter two)’. Such a social view of language as constructed is also in line with Gee’s notion of Discourses as being ‘more than just language’ (1996, p.127; see also chapter two).

Language, in this social perspective, as discourse or ways of speaking and understanding is constitutive of subject positions and thus implicated in relationships of power in classrooms, as Peirce asserts and as discussed in section one above, and in broader ‘institutional and epistemological contexts (Lea and Street, 2000, p.33; see chapter five)’. Blanche’s subject position and voice then is constituted by the discourses available and *unavailable* to her as she has to ‘stand up in front of mainstream teachers, and say ‘this is the way that you can help these students, these are their needs’. While now she is ‘not sure if teacher training, or MA programs can give me that’, *this is* what she ‘wanted to learn here’. She wanted to find ways of meeting the professional expectation on her to ‘know what those needs are’ and ‘to present (herself) and the needs of these children to mainstream teachers’. In other words, her ‘really big question’ is connected to her subject position as an ESL (English as a second language) teacher who knows that her profession is ‘marginalized in many contexts’. Blanche has experienced that some of her ‘mainstream’ colleagues at school viewed her work as marginal to their own, commenting ‘it’s not my job to teach this’ and ‘that’s the ESL teacher’s job’. In addition, and more damaging to her confidence when having to ‘stand up’ and speak to her colleagues, those who expressed the view that ‘anybody can teach English’ also gave her position and the discourses

available to her as an ESL teacher a lower status and less value than their own position and discourses as teachers of ‘mainstream’ disciplines.

The following extract from Blanche’s second interview elaborates the point of some of her colleagues not being sensitive to her students ‘unique needs’ a bit further.

MH: You were saying in your first interview actually that you want the other teachers to change their approaches. Could you maybe say once again [...] what is wrong with their approach do you think?

Blanche: Well, (long pause) I just think that they are not sensitive, I mean I've said that already, but I think they are just not sensitive to the possible capabilities, or the needs, of their ESL students, and it could be because they have so many students to look after, they feel 'well, I shouldn't have to do more for this one'. I don't know, but that's what's wrong with their approaches on the whole I think, and they are just not in tune with the fact that these students need special help, and they don't try to change themselves, they think that the student has to change kind of.

(Blanche, 2nd interview, p.7; see also chapter three, section eight, for a note on the ‘long pause’ in the transcript)

In pointing out that some of her colleagues ‘are just not sensitive to the *possible capabilities*, or the needs, of their ESL students’ (my emphasis), Blanche locates her colleagues’ approach in a discourse of student ‘deficits’. As Zamel (1998) observes, such a view is

shaped by an essentialist view of language in which language is understood to be a decontextualized skill that can be taught in

isolation from the production of meaning and that must be in place in order to undertake intellectual work (Zamel, 1998, p.253).

Blanche's colleagues then, it appears, conceptualise the work done with ESL (English as a second language) students as the teaching of decontextualised language skills that 'anyone' can do and, thus, firmly separate ESL teaching from the 'intellectual work' that they do in mainstream classrooms. Such 'deficit' or 'autonomous' views of language (see also chapter four, section five) impede rather than further students' development. Not only do such views marginalise and separate ESL students' learning from 'proper' academic work, they also marginalise ESL teaching itself, as Blanche noted (above). Such marginalisation creates institutional structures that position academic fields or disciplines and the teachers/lecturers affiliated with those in hierarchical ways. As Kramsch (2005, in press) observed, as a language teacher in (American) academia, she 'had become associated with a field that belonged to an inferior caste' and her colleagues in other fields 'ridiculed the claims that teaching language was more than teaching the mechanics of grammar and vocabulary (Kramsch, 2005, in press, ms., p.3; see also chapter two, section five)'.

Blanche's observations then that some of her colleagues were 'just not in tune' with her students' needs and that 'they don't try to change themselves, they think that the student has to change' can only be analysed from a conceptual framework that provides the analytic tools that take account of social and power relations within educational institutions.



Foucault's (1980) position on power is helpful here. According to Foucault, power is not monolithic and he asserts that individuals 'are not only its inert or consenting target; they are *always also the elements of its articulation* (1980, p.98, my emphasis)'. That is to say that educational institutions and the social positionings of students/teachers/lecturers are infused with the power relations of these sites but they also articulate and construct these sites as sets of complex social (and hierarchical) relations. My argument here is that such a theoretical vantage point, had it been available to Blanche, could have given her the conceptual tools to frame and debate her 'big question' about 'approaches for groups of students who don't all speak English as their first language' in a way that can take account of the 'articulations' of social structures and identities. It seems that Blanche was searching for such an epistemological frame for her big question to enable her to address the issue of marginalisation of her position as an ESL teacher, an issue that it appears the discourses available to her on her MA course could *not* articulate. It appears that such a line of argument would be supported by Benesch (2001), an academic in the field of EAP (English for academic purposes) which is closely related to the ESL context. She asserts,

Foucault's concepts of power offer a lens for understanding traditional EAP's assumption that students are powerless outsiders vis-à-vis academic institutions, although the literature does not explicitly discuss power relations. Instead it reduces students, for the most part, to passive recipients of content and neophytes who strive to gain access to academic discourse communities, accommodating themselves to the language genres, and activities observed. Foucault's theories also allow for a different type of conceptualization of EAP students as members whose more complicated responses to the status quo, including resistance, can be considered. (Benesch, 2001, p.54).



According to Benesch then, Foucault's discourse of power can provide a conceptual framework for teachers of EAP, or teachers of ESP like Blanche, within which to develop their own voice as members of academic institutions vis-à-vis 'mainstream' colleagues but also the voice of their 'non-mainstream' students. In the context of this case study, Foucault's concepts of power also underline the salience of 'context' in its broad institutional and epistemological sense if the aim is to understand better *what is going on* in educational encounters (see chapter one), for example, what is going on when students like Blanche meet 'with a little bit of a silence' (see chapter five) in response to their questions.

Blanches 'big question' also enabled her to make connections between her professional context as an ESL teacher to her experiences and observations as a student on her MA course. In the following interview extract she explores the way in which the issue of ESL students came up in a meeting with her report supervisor when she used the term 'linguistically diverse':

Blanche: I guess I've said 'linguistically diverse' because so many people are offended by certain terms [...], even in this country ESL is like a bad label. To me that's not a bad label at all. In fact, my report supervisor, he kind of thought that ESL, I think he saw that as a bit negative term, and he thought that some of my attitudes were condescending to ESL students, but I didn't think so at all. I'm trying to remember exactly what he said, ehm, I said that ESL students may not, for example, want to ask questions in class, they may feel hesitant, because they might feel not confident enough to raise their hand, you know, with their English limitations and all,

and he said ‘well, but all students are that way, and you’re trying to single ESL students out’, but I didn’t really think so.

(Blanche 2nd interview, p.6)

In talking about the issues raised by their disagreement about what terms could be best used to describe ‘linguistically diverse’ or ‘ESL students’, both Blanche and her tutor appear to be drawing on SLA (Second language acquisition) discourses of classroom interaction. As they disagree about whether, or to what extent, ESL students may find it more difficult than home students to be socialised into their new English speaking academic communities, their discussion also appears to be grounded in an ‘academic socialisation’ perspective (Lea and Street (1997, 2000; see discussion in chapters four and five). Arguably, Blanche and her supervisor could not resolve their disagreement as they were constrained by the discourses they were drawing on which did not allow them to take their analysis further to address issues of identity or relations of power in classroom encounters. As Lea and Street argue, an ‘academic socialisation’ perspective does not take account of the contested nature of language and learning in (higher) education. Furthermore, as Peirce (1995) asserts,

many (SLA theorists) have assumed that learners can be defined unproblematically as motivated or unmotivated, introverted or extroverted, inhibited or uninhibited, without considering that such affective factors are frequently socially constructed in inequitable relations of power, changing over time and space, and possibly coexisting in contradictory ways in a single individual (Peirce, 1995, p.12).

Peirce's insight then enables us to see that the discourses of motivation and other affective factors locate language learning and language acquisition in narrow individualistic notions of context which often do not conceptualise the ways in which such individual factors are 'socially constructed in inequitable relations of power'. Pierce's social view of learning also helps illuminate the ways in which MA students make meaning and 'interact' in classrooms as they draw on multiple and overlapping identity positions as both students and professionals. Blanche and her tutor's disagreement over the meaning of terms such as 'linguistically diverse' or 'ESL' and conceptualisations such as 'all students are that way, and you're trying to single ESL students out' (Blanche's tutor to Blanche) are embedded in discourses which, it appears, preclude a social analysis of such contested terms and ways of understanding. Blanche said in response to one of the questions that I asked every participant MA student towards the end of their second interviews:

MH: What would you describe as the value of the course to you, and what is it that you think that you're achieving?

Blanche: I think I'm achieving a good theoretical basis of knowledge, and I do think that I need to know about those things, because, for example, in the U.S. I think TESOL professionals also know about speech acts, and discourse analysis, and psycholinguistics, and sociolinguistics, so I did achieve that. I was exposed to these areas of knowledge, learned a little bit about some of them, and that's worth while, I believe, just for knowledge for its own sake, kind of . It may influence me later in teaching, maybe I



have developed a deeper sensitivity to the language learning process, and that can't hurt I think, so that will be my answer to that.

(Blanche, 2nd interview, p.12)

Although it is clear Blanche takes a broader and more instrumental view, she appreciates the 'theoretical basis of knowledge' that the discourses of 'speech acts, and discourse analysis, and psycholinguistics, and sociolinguistics' can give her, as she considers them to be valid even if they were 'just for knowledge for its own sake'. It would appear however that these knowledge frames did not prepare her for 'the big things' that she had come to learn and take back to her professional context. If, as discussed above and in chapter two, discourses 'define, describe, and delimit what it is possible to say and not possible to say (and by extension – what it is possible to do or not to do) (Kress, 1985, p.7)', then, by implication, lecturers define, describe and delimit the professional and academic voice that students can develop by making available or unavailable the discourses they can draw on in their studies. Blanche had come to develop her voice to stand up and be confident to enter a debate with her colleagues who 'just had no sensitivity to the unique needs of ESL students'. She wanted to learn to speak up on issues that not only mattered to her professionally but also affected her students. Instead, she felt that she was not yet in a position to address her 'big question' as she feared she might still be intimidated by her mainstream colleagues, using the psychological category of 'confidence' as analytic tool. Lea and Street (1997; 2000) have argued that 'skills' and 'deficit' approaches to student learning are embedded in disciplinary theories of behavioural and



experimental psychology and that teachers and lecturers often have recourse to those when describing their students' perceived 'needs' and, as Blanche demonstrates, their own.

The argument made here suggests that, for example, Peirce's (1989) concept of subject position, had it been available to Blanche, might have enabled her to deconstruct her and her work colleagues' social positionings and the discourses of her school and the way they impact on issues such as who has control over curricular decisions. It could then be argued that, as a consequence of having been able to develop such a critical understanding of her own and her colleagues' social positionings and discourses, Blanche might have developed a confident voice and the kind of 'rhetorical agency', discussed in chapter five (section five) to stand up vis a vis her 'very experienced' mainstream colleagues and debate those issues. If, however, as Peirce pointed out, students (like Blanche as an MA student) or teachers (like Blanche as an ESL teacher in North Carolina) 'cannot find subject positions for themselves within a particular discourse, they may be silenced (1989, p.405; see also section one above)'. It is useful here to return to Ivanič's (1998) point (see chapter one, section five) that

individuals are constrained in their selection of discourses by those to which they have access, and by the patterns of privileging which exist among them, but this does not dry up the alternatives altogether (Ivanič, 1998, p.23).

The concluding section in this chapter will make the argument then that such constraints and 'patterns of privileging' in the discourses to which students (and teachers/lecturers) have access need not 'dry up' alternative narratives and discourses in classrooms altogether.

## 7      **Calling on students: making it part of the pedagogy**

Jyl Lynn Felman (2001), who has in her classes students not only from the United States but also 'from Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos, Bangladesh, Ukraine, Russia, Ghana, Nigeria, Venezuela, Argentina, Brazil, Haiti, Jamaica, Cape Verde, Montserrat, China, and Japan' (Felman, 2001, p.92), discusses in her autobiographical account of her pedagogy *Never a dull moment. Teaching and the Art of Performance* with 'those who are listening' (Felman, 2001, preface xxi) a classroom methodology which 'calls on students, whether they raise their hands or not'. In the following extract, she reports a conversation with her boss, the chair of Women's Studies, after several complaints had been filed against her by students in one of her courses:

"Is it true that you call on students, whether they raise their hands or not?"

"Yes, that's right."

She looks surprised. "Isn't that rather aggressive on your part?"

"I don't understand the question. It's part of the pedagogy, particularly feminist. I can't imagine teaching in any other way. Otherwise the same students talk all the time."

"Does a student *have* to speak in your class?" She looks disturbed.

"They can pass, but I eventually come back to them."

"But you don't intimidate your students, do you?"

"I hope not. That would be counterproductive. This is about *voice*. About each student developing his or her voice."

She nods and I understand that we are finished. I am not surprised that there has been so much publicly performed distress about this particular classroom methodology. Nor am I surprised that it is always the women students who complain about being called on to speak. They are performing their learned *femininities* while I am performing *feminist*. (Felman, 2001, pp93-94, her emphasis).

For Felman then classroom methodology is not about classroom 'interaction' but 'about *voice*. About each student developing his or her voice'. Furthermore, for Felman 'it is critical that everyone speaks' because for her 'accent' is political. She explains:

Very often the women students in my classes are embarrassed if they speak English with a strong accent. I know they are upset when I call on them, but it is critical that everyone speaks. I discuss the situation with the entire class. "Some of us have accents and some of us don't know how to listen. It's political," I tell them, "to hear only one kind of English. The notion of standard English is relative." Then we discuss how many students are bilingual or trilingual, and how many speak only English. Inevitably, the students from outside the United States speak at least two, three, sometimes even four languages.

When the students complain to me that they cannot always understand Katrina, I tell them to listen harder. And I tell Katrina to speak up. Louder, so she can always be heard. Katrina wants to be an international banker; she will have to speak many languages, in many accents (Felman, 2001, pp91-92).

While some of Felman's students might want to be silent in class, like Katerina who is embarrassed by her Russian accent, and while some may complain that they 'cannot always understand' others' accents, Felman discusses with the whole class that 'the notion of standard English is relative'. As discussed in chapter four, assumptions of an idealised and 'native' speaker often implicitly underpin perceptions of 'appropriateness' of language use and judgements of students' language 'competence' and can hinder student participation in classroom debates. Rather than making



a linguistic argument about standard English and some of her students' perceived or self-imposed need to remain silent in class, Felman offers a pedagogical argument. She reminds them that 'to hear only one kind of English' is political because this is not about 'accent' but 'about *voice*. About each student developing his or her voice'.

The debates that Felman engages in with her whole class can be seen as a pedagogical way of responding to Hymes' concern to study the 'interaction between ability and opportunity with respect to narrative experience (1996, p.119)'. She engages each student in 'developing his or her voice', as they interact and self-reflexively explore and expand their abilities and opportunities to share and debate, in Lather's terms, their 'oppositional knowledge'. Felman's pedagogical practice is in line with Leibowitz's argument, as discussed in chapter two, who asserts that educators should build their classes and curricula 'from an understanding of the existing cultural capital of their students' (2004, p.49). Such debates in university classrooms can also unpack the meaning of contested terms such as 'contribution' (see chapter five) and challenge students to 'examine the assumptions underlying their own discourses' (Hewlett's, 1996, p.98; see section one above). Felman's pedagogical practice, which helps raise her students' awareness that 'some of us have accents and some of us don't know how to listen', also supports this chapter's argument that introducing into pedagogical practice focus group discussions of the kind used in this case study can generate 'genuine' dialogue on issues that matter to the students in their epistemological and institutional contexts.



Rather than having ‘the same students talk all the time’, as Felman says, ‘it is critical that everyone speaks’ because this is in fact political. This chapter, and indeed this thesis, agrees with Rowland (2003) that

spaces have to be created where uncomfortable questions can be asked and tentative ideas explored without the continual fear of failure that often dominates academic life. One of the major roles of academic or educational development can be seen as to provide such intellectual spaces (Rowland, 2002) (2003, p.25)’.

It appears that Felman’s practice of calling on students as part of the pedagogy creates such ‘intellectual spaces’ where she tells her students ‘to listen harder’ or ‘to speak up’ when they ask their questions or explore their ideas without fear of failure or embarrassment. This chapter has demonstrated that, in contrast to Felman’s classrooms, such intellectual spaces had not been created for students like Blanche, Alison and others on the MA courses that this case study draws on. The chapter has argued that the individual interviews but, more importantly, the focus group discussion that were set up for this study, while having a research function, also had a pedagogical function for the participant MA students (see section four above). This case study then provides telling cases of the students’ ‘narrative knowledge’ (Hymes) that speak to the wider theories, discussed in this thesis. The theoretical concepts of ‘subject positions’ (Peirce), ‘discourses’ (Foucault, Gee), ‘narrative ways of clarifying meaning’ (Hymes), and ‘cultural capital’ (Bourdieu, Kramsch, Leibowitz) have provided patterns and explanations for the ways in which students conceptualise the learning and teaching practices they encounter in postgraduate courses of education. Chapter six has argued the crucial role

of ‘uptake’ of student contributions and their narrative forms of knowledge as they disappear unless there is a response. Pedagogical spaces need to be created and nurtured that encourage and enable students, and lecturers, to pursue uncomfortable questions and explore tentative ideas. It has been argued that the *unavailability* of discourses can constrain students’ knowledge and identity construction not just in the educational contexts of their Master’s course but also for their professional development. It is through a classroom methodology of voice that students can be enabled to *listen harder* and *speak up* to make their questions and contributions not only heard but count as those of co-members of their academic and professional communities. The following chapter *Cycles of adjustment – a reflexive look back and ahead* will suggest implications of these findings for current pedagogical practice and further research.

**CHAPTER 7**  
**CYCLES OF ADJUSTMENT – A REFLEXIVE LOOK**  
**BACK AND AHEAD**

**One's own discourse and one's own voice, although born of another or dynamically stimulated by another, will sooner or later begin to liberate themselves from the authority of another discourse. This process is made more complex by the fact that a variety of alien voices enter into the struggle for influence within an individual's consciousness (just as they struggle with one another in surrounding social reality).**

**Bakhtin 1981, p.348**

**1      Cycles of adjustment: degrees of reflexivity**

The thesis has been written across a time frame which has increased the proximity between my experience of and insights into writing this case study as a doctoral student and my experience of and insights into teaching student writing as a teacher/lecturer in higher education. This proximity has informed and guided some of the epistemological and methodological decisions and directions I have taken but also brought to the fore and intensified some of the dilemmas and constraints that I experienced going through the research and writing process. In this concluding chapter I will take a reflexive look back and highlight the impact that doing and writing this case study has had on my self-development as a teacher/lecturer in higher education, and vice versa. Drawing on the findings of the case study and on these self-reflexive insights, the chapter will call attention to implications of the thesis for current pedagogic practice on postgraduate programmes with regard to student self-development. Finally, the chapter

critically evaluates the study and formulates initial thoughts on future research directions.

In writing the thesis I have followed conventional ways to signpost for the reader the steps of the process, thus suggesting a linear research process and creating for the reader a smooth and clear path to follow. In similar 'linear' ways, the final chapter adds a critical look back on the research and thesis writing process after the thesis has been completed. It is not, however, an 'add-on' but an integral part of the thesis as it creates the space to reflect on the long silences that often interrupted the flow and linear progress of this project. It thus helps develop a critical perspective on the research process and makes explicit some of the 'cycles of adjustment' I have gone through as I was writing the thesis. Griffiths (1998) explains:

The order of the questions in the logical framework should not be confused with when things happen in practice. Logically, the abstractions of epistemology come first, followed by methodology and finally methods and techniques. But this [...] is hardly ever descriptive of research as it happens, where the order may be reversed, at least in the early stages, after which there are cycles of adjustment in understanding of methods, methodology and epistemology. During these cycles, the research is developed and refined (Griffiths, 1998, p.108).

As set out in chapter one (section seven), the overview of the thesis suggests such a linear progression from the epistemological assumptions to the methodological decisions which guide data collection, analysis and, finally, presentation of findings. However, as Griffiths observes,



research reports give a misleading picture of research: the business of getting started on a piece of research, carrying it out and getting it used. Like any other practical activity (teaching, for instance), doing research is not a smooth, linear path from beginning to end (Griffiths, 1998, p.105).

As I was getting started on this case study, I had not yet encountered Griffith in my reading but have later inserted into the chapters pointers forward to this final chapter and its focus on the multiple cycles of adjustment in understanding that I went through in doing the research and on the moments of stagnation in writing the 'report'. Had I had an awareness of the intimate interplay between methods, methodologies and epistemologies from the beginning of the project, I might have been able to interpret some of the doubts and silences that I experienced as moments of 'adjustment' rather than stagnation. Such an early awareness might have enabled me to accept and make sense of these cycles, dilemmas, open questions, and silences as being part of any research process in the social sciences which necessitates re-thinking, adjustments and re-writing. However, it is important to recognise that while some of these adjustments may have been easier to recognise at the time,

there may be limits to reflexivity, and to the extent to which we can be aware of the influences on our research both at the time of conducting it and in the years that follow. It may be more useful to think in terms of 'degrees of reflexivity, with some influences being easier to identify and articulate at the time of our work while others may take time, distance and detachment from the research (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003, p.425).

In line with Mauthner and Doucet's argument I am acknowledging that reflexivity is always a partial process. I am writing this chapter then as an integral part of the thesis as it enables me to address issues connected to the thesis writing process

explicitly and point to implications for current pedagogic practice and future research.

## **2 Liberating our own discourses from the authority of others**

As I was asking *my* big questions in the initial stages of the doctoral research process for this case study, I was struggling to reconcile and work through some of the constraints that I was experiencing. Like Blanche who had struggled to raise her ‘big question’ (see chapter six, section six) on her MA course, I found that the applied linguistics discourses available to me did not speak to the questions I was asking. As I was ‘collecting’ and beginning to analyse the data, I also found that the ‘selection of discourses’ (Ivanič, 1998) available to me at the beginning of this case study such as the SLA (Second language acquisition) discourses of classroom interaction and other discourses available in the field of ELT and TESOL did not resonate with the participant MA students’ responses. And yet, I had to press on with the interview process, analyse data and go back to ‘collect’ more data before the students would complete their MA courses and no longer be available for further interviews. I was excited about the insights the students were bringing to this study and yet I was unsure how to give structure to this ‘mountain of data’ (see also discussion in chapter three). I had not yet access to Mauthner and Doucet’s (1998) observation that

the early phases of data analysis can [...] feel messy, confusing and uncertain because we are at a stage where we simply do not know what to think yet (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998, p.122).

I was struggling to find and develop my voice in response to the interview data and the literature available to me at the time. On the one hand, I was facing the dilemma of working within and trying to understand what it means to work within a *recursive* qualitative/interpretivist research frame while, on the other hand, I had to write a ‘literature review’ in order to prove to the educational institutions that I was making *linear* progress as a research student. Mauthner and Doucet (1998) again, provide useful insights when they continue their discussion of the initial stages of research when ‘we simply do not know what to think yet’. They write:

This is the whole point of data analysis – to learn from and about the data; to learn something new about a question by listening to other people. But while this sense of knowing and of openness is exciting, it is also deeply uncomfortable. These kinds of processes are very difficult to articulate, especially in the logical, sequential, linear fashion that tends to be required in a research text (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998, p.122).

I was indeed ‘excited’ about the MA students’ depth of insights and observations they were sharing in their individual interviews and in the focus group discussion and about the way in which the issues they raised were resonating with the questions that were guiding this case study. I was also excited by some of the feedback I got when giving presentations that reported some of the initial ‘findings’. However, as Mauthner and Doucet discussed, I was still also ‘deeply uncomfortable’ and felt constrained knowing that my progress would be assessed on the basis of a ‘logical, sequential, linear [...] research text’. In other words, as I was giving presentations and beginning to ‘talk the talk’ of doing research, I had not yet been able to ‘take hold’ (Street and Street, 1991, p.146; see also chapter six, section three) of the social practices that would constitute my social identity as a researcher and to understand and reconcile ‘circular’ and ‘linear’ ways of



doing and writing research, and to give meaning to the ‘cycles of adjustment’ discussed in section one above. It appears that my quest for alternative discourses resonates with Blanche’s observation:

I think I’ll just have to fill in the gaps myself, I mean, I was hoping for a training programme that would kind of make me feel like I knew what I was doing, and kind of fill in the gaps. [...] Maybe, that was an idealistic expectation to begin with anyway. [...] But I feel that this course has not prepared me for the big things I really have to do when I go back to work. (Blanche, 1st interview, pp.2-3)

Blanche it seems concluded that she might ‘just have to fill the gaps (her)self’ but she also recognised that she might have had an ‘unrealistic expectation to begin with’ that no educational programme can meet. In order to find her voice and to put herself in a position to do ‘the big things’ when going back to work, she would have to search for the discourses that were unavailable to her on her course.

Like Blanche, I was struggling to fill in the gaps and to ‘orchestrate’ (Lillis and Ramsey, 1997, p.19) the voices available to me. Exploring the ‘roots’ of my questions, I was moving into new and previously to me unavailable discourses such as those of ‘social positioning’ and ‘Discourses’ with a capital ‘D’. During the ‘long silences on paper’ that ensued, in Foucault’s words (see chapter one), I was ‘straying afield of (my)self’ into alternative realms of making meaning. Ruth Vinz’s (Ely, Vinz, Downing and Anzul, 1997) metaphor of what she calls ‘the rhizomatics of thought’ is helpful here:



The rhizomatics of thought help me begin to conceptualize what Interdisciplinarity might actually mean. Well, this is a beginning. I'm feeling the need to stop writing and head back to the overstuffed chair to read. Yes, I am a hybrid of many 'isms' that structure my tendencies of thought. These have become more conscious, more experimental over the years as I have learned that each is somehow implicated in how I pose questions – or even the ones I choose to raise – the types of questioning, the methodological vigilance with which I turn to read the text, and the way I understand, value, and examine spoken and implied discourses in all the work I do (Ely, Vinz, Downing and Anzul, 1997, p.258).

Hornby's (2000) dictionary, explains that a 'rhizome' is the 'thick stem of some plants [...] that grows along under the ground and has roots and stems growing from it'. Vinz's metaphor uncovers and highlights the structures and 'tendencies of thought' that grow over years like 'thick stems' and nourish the questions that we pose like 'roots and stems growing from it'. In other words, the questions that we pose and 'all the work' we do are *rooted* in the discourses that both Blanche and I were searching for; the questions *stem* from those discourses.

While the study was not designed to be 'longitudinal', it has nevertheless acquired a longitudinal characteristic, namely the 'lived experience' of the researcher in the field of research. As I lived this experience, I was lost for words many times and many times I felt I could not go on. However, throughout this doctoral research I never lost touch with its main concern because the area that I was investigating mattered not only to me academically and professionally but also to the participant MA students who, like Alison (chapter six, section three) had been explicit about wanting to make a contribution to this study. I did not want to jeopardise this 'chance to investigate an area which matters' (Griffiths, 1998, p.105; see also chapter one, section four) and this opportunity to further my own understanding of and make a contribution to current debates of language in

education issues. Throughout the research I have also been inspired by the insights and concerns raised by the participant MA students in the interviews and focus group discussion. Linda, for example, made the connection between the theoretical understanding she was gaining on her MA course and her concern for the implications of those for her teaching practice:

The thing that I had in my mind is the extent to which we practise what we say. Generally speaking, much as we are students now for this time, we are going to go back to our work and sometimes continue with the same mistakes that our lecturers have reflected on us during this course. And our students, if they were to be given a chance such as this that we had, would say the same thing about us. And [...] the question that remains in my mind is, you know, the true reflection of what we say in what we do.

(Linda, Focus group discussion, p.40)

Linda's concern about 'the extent to which we practise what we say' illustrates that she is reflexive as a practitioner about her teaching practice but also as a student in her MA classrooms. It also resonates with and thus supports this study's aim, as discussed in chapter two (section three), to recognise and promote critical and reflexive language learning and teaching practices. Like Linda, in the following extract from her second interview, Alison links her observations as a student in her MA classrooms to a self-reflexive account of her own teaching practice:

MH: You were also saying that lecturers at times seem to perceive students to be 'a better student'. Who do you think lecturers might perceive as 'a better student'?

A: You know, while you ask me this question it makes me recall of my own teaching experiences, and somehow I realize that's what used to happen, I mean when I started teaching in my own classroom is what happens at times in this course [...]. When I started teaching I had that tendency of maybe concentrating on the more vocal students [...], to an extent that I would ignore others and hardly ever take notice of them. [...] On reflection, when I realized that I'm always concentrating on the students who are always talking in class, the next lesson I tried to invite the ideas of the reserved students, suppose I get three students shouting the answer, I'd choose the most reserved in that group to give me his comments, or his answer to the question.  
(Alison, 2nd interview, p.7)

Alison's reflexive and critical evaluation of the ways in which, as a beginning teacher, she had the tendency to listen to the 'more vocal students' and 'hardly ever take notice' of others also reinforces the pedagogical argument made in this case study and its implications for pedagogic practice. In chapter six I showed that calling on students and *making it part of the pedagogy* is about voice: 'about *each* student developing his or her voice' (Felman, my emphasis) and about the role and responsibility of educators to create spaces in which students (and teachers/lecturers) can ask questions but also give answers 'without the continual fear of failure that often dominates academic life' (Rowland). Alison then, 'on reflection' about her own teaching practice, began 'to invite the ideas of the reserved students' and chose 'the most reserved' to give his or her comment to her question. While I felt that self-reflexive comments such as these from some of the participant MA students sustained not only the way in which I was conducting the study but would also support my thesis, I nevertheless had regular and deep doubts about whether I would be able to find my way and my words.



I found that my doubts and ‘silences on paper’ resonated with Stephen Rowland’s experience who speaks of the panic and angst he felt when he was asked by a colleague if he would write something about his involvement in a project to transform higher education teaching methods in South Africa after the collapse of Apartheid. He found that while he should be able to do this, he had the overriding feeling that he could not do it. He explains:

My immediate response was one of panic. Yes, I really should be able to do this, but the trouble was I had nothing to say (Rowland, 2000, p.86).

However, he was able to find a way through this angst when he realised that

I must say something about my inability to say anything. My problem of having nothing to say was not a reason for *not* writing. In fact, being lost for words was the very thing I need to write about (Rowland, 2000, p.86; his emphasis).

Through a story, both fictional and real, and his subsequent reflections on that story, he was able to identify and put into words the things – ‘the issues of identity, race, difference and power (Rowland, 2000, p.85)’ - that he felt were so vital to discuss because they not only reached deep into his experience of contributing to the ‘transformation [...] of teaching methods’ (Rowland, 2000, p.85) on post-Apartheid South Africa but also into his day-to-day work and research context in the UK. Through Rowland’s account I was able to see that my ‘inability to say anything’ was intricately linked to issues of subject position and notions of discourse and voice, as discussed in chapter six, and embedded in the



discourses *unavailable* to me during those times of doubt and silence on paper.

However, as Bakhtin (1981) observes:

One's own discourse and one's own voice, although born of another or dynamically stimulated by another, will sooner or later begin to liberate themselves from the authority of another discourse. This process is made more complex by the fact that a variety of alien voices enter into the struggle for influence within an individual's consciousness (just as they struggle with one another in surrounding social reality) (Bakhtin, 1981, p.348).

Writing this chapter then constitutes one part, among others, of 'pulling off' (Gee, 1999, p.1; see also discussion in chapter two, section seven) my social identity as a research student. During this complex process in which, like the participant students on their MA courses, I had to enact my identity as a research student who is subjected to assessment and evaluation and as a lecturer who has been seeking to broaden her professional experience and deepen her theoretical insight. I had to juggle those different 'ways of being in the world' so that my role and identity could be recognised in the thesis, or in Gee's terms, 'on site'.

### **3 Writing the thesis: impact on my own pedagogic practice**

In the following extract from the focus group discussion, Alex, John and Rachael discuss the way in which they were trying to develop an understanding of what was expected of them in writing coursework:

Alex: I feel the pressure of the time. [...] I find it very demanding, and right now I'm struggling with my coursework, because that is the thing I find most annoying of all, the fact that you're not given any guidelines

whatsoever to do your coursework, but you're expected to bring up something really acceptable.

[...]

John: You're not given a list of options.

Alex: Sometimes they will give you a list of options or say 'well, why don't you try this, or working on this', but to an extent that's good, because you can work on whatever *you* want, but if you don't have an idea of your own, then that's not good. So the other thing is that once you get that idea, you have to decide on how to go about it. There is a very brief outline, like: introduction, discussion, and conclusion, but that is very broad, you know. So you can go to your tutors, sometimes, they never say 'no', [...] but sometimes when you go there they have a limited amount of time.

John: Hm, sure.

Alex: And it's not very easy to get help really. Sometimes they would tell you to 'why don't you include this, or you need to talk about this', you know, but then [...] I have to read another book, or to know books to do this, so actually it's very tough. I find it very tough.

[...]

Rachael: I haven't had any guidance at all actually, you don't know what's acceptable, and you have no idea what sort of level you are operating at. [...] It's just like operating in a void to me. [...] And all my tutor said was 'oh, well, that sounds OK'. And I said 'well, could you recommend some books, and she went into the catalogue, and I thought 'well, I could have done that', you know, and that was it. [...]

Alex: Yes, on the other hand, we don't know if it's a very good idea at all, because I did one coursework last term, that I didn't ask anybody anything, and they seemed to like it, but this time I went and asked them the opinion, to the same tutor, and he suggested a lot of changes, and I thought 'oh, why did I come here'. So you never know.

Rachael: And then also you feel, I got the impression that they think if you are asking too much, it's because you are a bit lost, and therefore you are not, you know, you are struggling, that kind of idea. [...] You would have to be very demanding, I think, to get guidance, and as I said, [...] maybe they would think that you were a bit hopeless, that's the impression I get.  
(Focus Group Discussion, pp.7-9)

Both Alex and Rachael appear to agree that they would like to be given more 'guidance' by their tutors on what kind of coursework would be seen as 'something really acceptable'. On the one hand, it appears that asking for guidance did not necessarily achieve what the students expected. Alex did not want to 'have to read another book' and Rachael felt that, rather than her tutor pointing her to the catalogue, she could have gone there herself. She is also concerned that some tutors might think that 'if you are asking too much, it's because you are a bit lost', or 'a bit hopeless'. While these comments seem to suggest that the students were looking to the tutors to guide them, other comments appear to suggest that, at the same time, the students pursued their writing assignments confidently on their own. Alex, for example, found that her tutors 'seemed to like' her assignment, even though she 'didn't ask anybody anything'. Although Alex found the time pressure 'very demanding', she observed that you need to 'have an idea of our own' and 'once you get that idea, you have to decide on how to go about it'. Geisler's (1995) perspective is helpful here. From an

academic's perspective, in her paper *Writing and Learning at Cross Purposes in the Academy* she writes:

Most of us assume without thought that writing is a way of thinking and learning and we are repeatedly distressed to see our students doing something less. What we need to recognize, however, is that the relationship between writing and learning is far trickier than is generally acknowledged (Geisler, 1995, p.116).

The MA students' comments above appear to support Geisler's observation that 'the relationship between writing and learning is far trickier' than generally recognised. The MA students, it seems, want to be guided in their learning in a way that does not put them at risk of being seen to be 'struggling'. They also have 'ideas of (their) own' that they wish to and are able to pursue without asking 'anybody anything'. How then can this tricky and complex relationship between writing, speaking in classrooms and learning be acknowledged and how might pedagogic practice take account of it? What implications does the case study have for current pedagogic practice?

My professional development as a lecturer of writing and academic literacies, while constantly delaying the visible linear progress of my own thesis writing, has also driven forward and deepened my understanding of the 'tricky' relationship, in Geisler's terms, and the recursive nature of doing and writing research. My own experience of working through the challenges that writing this case study presented to me as a novice academic writer supports the findings of the case study which suggest that there is a need to create pedagogic spaces or, in Felman's (2001) terms, 'intellectual spaces' (see chapter six) that enable students,



and lecturers, to develop their voices both in classroom debates but also in their written academic assignments. As Geisler (1995) contends,

the core issue at stake in the writing practices of the academy is knowledge rather than mechanics (Geisler, 1995, p.101).

The findings of this case study suggest that not only the writing practices of the academy but also the practices of speaking in classrooms are a matter of ‘knowledge rather than mechanics’. These findings resonate with my background in European higher education, where student speaking and student presentations are central to seminars and integral to student assessment and where students struggle in classrooms, as they do in their writing, to formulate a coherent point and to ‘listen harder’ and ‘speak up’ (chapter six). Felman (2001) provides an account of an assignment she sets in one of her courses:

I tell the students in Autobiography: *Write about a time in your life when you stopped speaking. Using microscopic detail and nonlinear narrative, tell the reader how old you were. And why you became silent. Finally, when, if ever, did you start speaking again?* When they’re finished writing, the students volunteer to read their narratives out loud. I do not have to call on a single student to describe the moment she stopped speaking. Everyone recalls an exact time and place when she lost her voice. These are some of the most powerful narratives they write all semester (Felman, 2001, p.94, her emphasis).

Felman’s students’ keen responses as they ‘volunteer to read their narratives out aloud’ resonates with Rowland’s (2000, p.86) observation that ‘being lost for words was the very thing (he) need(ed) to write about’ and with my own experience of ‘long silences on paper’, discussed in the previous section. These accounts then speak to the findings of this case study which suggest that there is a

need for lecturers to instigate ‘genuine’ dialogue both in classroom discussions but also in students’ writing. Richardson (2000), who considers ‘writing as a *method of inquiry*, a way of finding out about yourself and your topic’ (2000, p.923, her emphasis) suggests that writers produce ‘narratives about the writing process itself’. She explains:

These are *narratives about contexts* in which the writing is produced. They situate the author’s writing in other parts of the author’s life, such as disciplinary constraints, academic debates, departmental politics, social movements, community structures, research interests, familial ties, and personal history. They offer critical reflexivity about the writing-self in different contexts as a valuable creative analytic practice (Richardson, 2000, p.931, my emphasis).

Ivanič (1998), it seems, offers her readers such a narrative about her ‘writing-self’ in *Writing and Identity: The discoursal construction of identity in academic writing*, giving her readers an insight into her personal and professional histories that are implicated in her research/writing:

I am not a neutral, objective scribe conveying the objective results of my research in my writing. I am bringing to it a variety of commitments based on my interests, values and beliefs which are built up from my own history as a white English woman [...], as an adult educator [...], as someone who only seriously engaged with the academic community in my late thirties, now a lecturer [...], teaching and researching in the field of language, literacy and education. I am a writer with a multiple social identity, tracing a path between competing ideologies and their associated discourses (Ivanič, 1998, p.1).

In courses that I run on academic writing as a lecturer ‘with special reference to professional and academic literacies’, I have engaged students in such ‘critical reflexivity’ about their writing in various contexts. In those sessions, I give students a few minutes to individually consider the various contexts within which

they were writing prior to their MA or PhD studies. I ask them to pay special attention to the ways in which these contexts impacted on their writing. They then discuss their individual experiences in small groups, before I ask them to share some of these 'writing-stories' (Richardson, 1997; 2000) with the whole group. The aim is to explore and better understand, in Ivanič's words, 'the social struggles in which the self is implicated through the act of writing (1998, p.2)'. In other words, the pedagogy focuses on the ways in which 'competing ideologies and their associated discourses' impact on writing practices rather than writing as a 'neutral' or academic 'skill'.

In one of the sessions, one MA student gave an account of such clarity and insight that I asked her whether she would be willing to repeat her story outside class so I could tape-record and use it to instigate similar discussions with other groups of students (see Appendix 7.1 for transcript of tape-recorded student writing-story). In the session, the student had also made notes in the form of a diagram (see Appendix 7.2), which she referred to in her account. As Richardson (2000) argues, such writing-stories 'offer critical reflexivity' about ourselves as writers, if done in the form of diaries or through other individual media. I am taking her argument further by suggesting that lecturers should create spaces for their students to share and debate such accounts in order to deepen their students' critical and reflexive insights into aspects of 'the whole institutional and epistemological context' (Lea and Street, 2000; see chapter five) of their academic writing and learning but also to create a forum to debate the contested and social nature of academic writing and learning in and across the disciplines. In the following extract the student, who explained that she had been involved in three



different contexts: public policy, sociology and education, explores her ‘subject position’ with regard to the writing she was required, or as the extract demonstrates, *not* required to do:

Well, ‘education’ because the first thing I did when I finished high school was to study to become a teacher. I did a degree to become a teacher. In my country, the degree to become a teacher and to become a sociolog(ist) is in two different institutions, which are a different context, in a way. Because as a teacher you are not supposed to be involved in an academic context. I mean it’s just like a more practical context and the focus would be on learning, and teaching issues, or organisational or institutional perspectives. It’s not like the relationships between – you wouldn’t think there of social class or gender, or relationships between education and society. You would just think about what’s the best way of teaching, [...] the contents that you’re going to be teaching and that.

(Student writing-story, p.1)

The student shares her insight that, as a teacher, you would be expected to be concerned about ‘what’s the best way of teaching’ and ‘the contents that you’re going to be teaching’ but not about issues of ‘social class or gender, or relationships between education and society’. As a teacher, ‘you are not supposed to be involved in an academic context’. I want to suggest that MA students, like the students who participated in this case study, need space to produce and discuss such self-reflexive accounts of their ‘subject position’ (Peirce, 1989) as a teacher in a ‘more practical context’ and as an MA student in an ‘academic context’ as such accounts can help bring to light the impact that such social locations have on the expectations and requirements that the students were struggling to unpack (see discussion above). Such accounts can also help explore implicit assumptions such



as teaching being a 'neutral' practice, an assumption the student does not agree with. She observed, speaking to her notes (see Appendix 7.2):

This diagram here on the right is also like a policy spectrum because I believe that in any of these contexts and within this different contexts you have like a policy, like more a politic(al) way in which you focus what you do. And that would be like thinking of left-wing, or right-wing, or more center-wing, and where you stand up when you think of society, if you are like more neo-liberal, or you think more that a welfare state is better for organizing social issues. And I think this spectrum is crossing each one of the, of this different contexts. Although perhaps in the educational context we don't see it as much, because we tend to think that teachers are more neutral, and they are not, like they are not teaching in a, in a politic(al) spectrum but they are, they are.

(Student writing-story, p.2)

Arguably, debates of such often hidden assumptions can help students unpack often conflicting expectations and requirements in different 'practical' or 'academic' contexts. In the following extract, the student explains and analyses 'ways of writing':

Another thing is ways of writing. And that would be like the people that you choose to reference and the vocabulary that you would use. When you usually write in academic writing [...] you would use a lot of different words, explaining what they mean, and concepts. And when you write in public policy that depends to whom you write. [...] But if you're writing a document and you want policy makers and people from the educational system to read, you wouldn't use those terms. Because they are too complicated and they tend to confuse the reader more than giving them help in understanding.

(Student writing-story, pp.2-3)

The student here highlights that the decisions she has taken in her writing with regard to 'reference and the vocabulary that you would use' were embedded in the institutional and professional contexts she was located in. As Richardson (2000) asserts, such writing-stories

evoked new questions about the self and the subject; they remind us that our work is grounded, contextual, and rhizomatic (p.931).

The pedagogy, as demonstrated above, helps create 'intellectual spaces' in which writing-stories such as the one analysed here can be explored and discussed with students. Writing-stories nurture the development of writers as they further our critical understanding of the 'grounded, contextual, and rhizomatic' nature of writing and research. They also further a self-reflexive approach to the writing practices we engage in, in particular to the decisions we take both as readers and writers which are deeply associated with social positioning and the discourses un/available to us at the time of writing, reading and researching.

#### **4      Looking ahead: implications for pedagogic practice and research**

What is at stake in teaching and learning on Master's courses is the MA students' self as professionals who need to see their professional context and expertise valued (chapter four, section six) and who need their contributions to be heard and responded to (chapter five and six). As argued in chapter six, students' narrative forms of clarifying meaning which are based on their professional experiences and contexts are as valuable as currently privileged forms such as discussions of

terms and concepts which are rooted in the academic literature. Privileging 'competent' and 'appropriate' contributions to classroom debates over genuine dialogue may 'deprofessionalise' (Ivanič, 1998) the expertise that MA students bring to the educational encounter. There is a need for lecturers and students to engage in debates and respond to questions generated by alternative or 'oppositional' discourses which examine and challenge taken-for-granted assumptions and implicit values and thus recognise the social and contextual embeddedness of learning and teaching practices.

In chapter six I showed that the interviews and in particular the focus group discussion which I deployed as research tools turned out to be themselves also indicators of the kind of pedagogical tool that follows from theories of academic literacy that encourage oppositional narratives in classrooms but also their critical and self-reflexive examination through discussion and debate. The MA students in this case study were concerned (see chapter five) to be given the opportunity to make 'knowledge that is relevant' (Harry) and to bring their own difficulties and questions to the course as this 'inevitably adds something' (Blanche) to their colleagues', and lecturers', thinking. Such expectations are grounded in an academic literacies approach to learning and writing in higher education which recognizes that students struggle to unpack the social meanings that underpin the knowledge 'relevant' to their teaching and learning contexts and to 'take hold' of their professional and academic identities. If, as argued in chapter five, learning in higher education involves engaging in practices of knowledge construction and adapting to new ways of knowing and understanding, then lecturers need to create

the ‘intellectual spaces’ that enable students to engage in the very processes that constitute learning as knowledge construction.

This thesis makes a contribution not only to the academic literacies literature but also to that on pedagogy in English language teaching. If the goal in education and in language education in particular is for students to engage with cultural and institutional assumptions and values, lecturers need to create opportunities for students to critically and self-reflexively examine, and possibly challenge, key concepts and assumptions in English language teaching such as notions of ‘competence’, ‘appropriateness’ and the ‘native speaker’ (NS) of English (see chapter four). As Jenkins (2003) argues,

when English is used for international communication, that is, among speakers from a wide range of international settings, then it cannot have ‘non-native speakers’ (Jenkins, 2003, pp.80-81).

Jenkins asserts that the ‘native speaker/non-native speaker distinction’ can be upheld for contexts in which English is learned and taught as a foreign language, whilst in EIL (English as an international language) contexts there are ‘often no NS present at all’ (p.81). This highlights not just the contested nature of concepts such as the ‘native speaker’ but also, as argued in chapter five, the importance to debate such contested terms in their institutional and epistemological contexts.

However, as James, the focus group moderator, put to me in a conversation after the focus group discussion:



Unfortunately people come also with a mentality of an MA handbook.  
(Focus group moderator on moderating, p.4)

James observation, then, suggests that further research is needed that extends this case study and the insights it provides. This case study has arguably been limited and constrained by a research design that draws on interviews with self-selecting MA students alone rather than also on interviews with lecturers and broader groups of students. While the justification and rationale for these methodological decisions have been discussed in chapter three, such broader groups of participants would have added invaluable data and insights. Further research is thus needed that draws on lecturers' insights as well as students' perceptions in order to further explore the gaps in lecturers' and students' purposes in teaching and learning which should also include case studies of courses or programmes in other disciplinary fields or areas in higher education. The findings of this case study then cannot be generalised to suggest that *all* students would welcome being given the 'intellectual spaces' suggested here to develop their 'voice' and 'speak up'.

Benesch (2001), expanding on Boomer's (1992) notion of 'demystification of learning', argues that

demystification is encouraging students to speak up when they do not understand and to make it clear that they expect their questions to be taken seriously, not ignored in the name of coverage or impatience with their pace of learning. In this formulation, students are not novices, or outsiders, who must surrender to the language and practices of academic discourse communities; rather, they are active members of the academy whose rights should be considered. This does not mean that students are required to speak up but that this option should be available (Benesch, 2001, p.139).

While this case study suggests that lecturers and students need to negotiate their classrooms as spaces where students can speak up and where they can develop their voice, Chanock (2005, p.11, ms.) argues that students who ‘value listening over speaking, or emulation over contradiction, or harmony over argument’ may not be comfortable with expectations of students to be ‘assertive’ (Chanock, 2005, p.10, ms.). It is a further limitation of this case study that differences such as those observed by Chanock but also Alison’s observation that those students who are more ‘vocal in a certain way’ can have their contributions and questions more easily acknowledged by their lecturers cannot be substantiated further from data gained through recorded classroom interaction (see chapter six). Thus, further research is needed that draws on more extensive classroom observation and (video)taped classroom encounters in order to address those issues and take account of ways in which students may or may not be able to negotiate how they participate in and contribute to classroom debates.

The ethnographic-style approach taken in this case study has opened up innovative avenues both for research and pedagogic practice. The study has made the case for self-reflexive approaches to learning, writing, and teaching that do not silence our own or our students’ voices. Despite the limitations discussed above, using myself as a research tool has made possible a unique insight into ‘what is going on’ in learning and teaching in multi-cultural groups of postgraduate students in higher education in Britain. The insights that I gained as I was moving in and out of the researched group, which are embedded in my identity position as a student-cum-researcher, did not only enhance the analysis in this study but could inspire literacy researchers to develop self-reflexive research designs that draw on

their own as well as their research participants' reflexive accounts. Finally, my 'longitudinal' experience of student writer but also lecturer in the field of writing in higher education informed not only this study but, as discussed above, also my pedagogic practice. As Rachael observed (see discussion in chapter three), the focus group discussion she participated in made her think. As she said, 'you are given the opportunity to articulate things'. Pedagogic practices then that further the way in which students 'articulate things' so as to foster genuine dialogue and to encourage oppositional 'ways of speaking' can deepen our understanding of the cycles of adjustment that both teachers and learners have to go through for their learning and teaching to be fruitful and for their voices and discourses to 'liberate themselves'.

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## **APPENDICES**

# Appendix 1.1:

## 5. The Grading of Work: A Note to Participants

Participants work will be returned by tutors with a comment and a grade. The grade can be generally interpreted in the following way.

- A Excellent work in all respects. A distinction mark which denotes a distinguished piece of work. The work shows a thorough grasp of all aspects of the topic with evidence of originality of thought, wide reading and a synthesis of views. Examples are used very well to support a clearly articulated argument.
- B Very good work. You should be well pleased with a mark in this range. It means you have researched the topic well, have demonstrated a very good grasp of the topic and have presented a well organised and well written essay, supported by reference to relevant literature.
- C A solid, satisfactory average mark. You could probably improve it, though, by paying attention to one or more of the following things.
- \* a clearer organisation in the sections of your essay and a clearer line of argument running through
  - \* reference to a wider range of reading
  - \* making sure that you have covered all aspects of the topic
  - \* checking that you have given examples to illustrate what you are saying so that your argument is clearer
  - \* getting a balance between the various parts of the essay, e.g. a balance between theory and practice
  - \* clearer expression of your ideas in English
- D This is a below average answer. Although your work is coherent it displays a less than full grasp of the issues significant to the topic. Your references to the literature, while relevant, may have been perfunctory. You may have adequately supported some of your points but you have not fully used the input available from the course
- E This is a fail. It indicates that there are major weaknesses in your work. E.g.
- \* you have misunderstood what was required and your argument has not addressed the topic properly.
  - \* your treatment of the topic is too brief, undeveloped and unsubstantiated
  - \* you show evidence of crucial gaps in your understanding
  - \* you have not read widely or deeply enough or your work demonstrates misunderstanding of the required reading
- If you receive an E grade you will be counselled as to the exact reasons for the fail.



# Appendix 3.1: Participant observation: Field notes ('annotated lecture notes')

- functionalist

Halliday (he claims to have developed a grammar of disc, social grammar)

critical language analyst

Kos

(this is grammar close to ground level, much less generalized)

grammar is not impartial

- all language descriptions are incomplete and biased

P.O.

my role in this tutorial is listening & it is about how individual students define, find and to become to feel secure in the exam as the exam is all about how you as an individual

a lot of this observation becomes in the talk

relate to what has been dealt with in the session, as to do with the tension between institutional and individual

during the normal session when there is process I can be a participant and

→ phone the Record student to see what his feelings were

### **Appendix 3.2:**

#### **List of participant MA students in alphabetical order (pseudonyms)**

##### *Alex*

non-native speaker of English, a teacher of young adults at high school level in Mexico;

##### *Alison*

non-native speaker of English, and English language teacher in a secondary school in her home country Botswana;

##### *Ann*

non-native speaker of English, a teacher of English as a foreign language in an English department for both pre-service and in-service training of secondary school teachers and college teachers in her home country China;

##### *Blanche*

overseas student in Britain, a native speaker of American English who has worked in a teaching English as a second language context in the U.S.;

##### *Bob*

non-native speaker of English, a teacher of English as a foreign language for future trainers of English at university level in his home country China;

##### *Francisco*

non-native speaker of English, a teacher of English to students of English from a young age in his home country Argentina;

##### *Harry*

native speaker of English, a teacher of English who prior to being an M.A. student was a teacher of EFL, working in Spain and other European countries;

##### *John*

native speaker of English, a teacher of English as a foreign language in London and abroad at all levels (mainly young adults);

##### *Linda*

non-native speaker of English, English teacher in secondary schools in her home country South Africa;

##### *Maya*

non-native speaker of English, a teacher of English to junior and senior high school students in her home country Japan, and a teacher of English as a foreign language to Japanese students in London;

##### *Rachael*

native speaker of English who taught English as a foreign language in Spain;

##### *Zaitun*

non-native speaker of English, a teacher of English in secondary schools, and also a teacher trainer in her home country Indonesia.



### **Appendix 3.3:**

#### **Second interviews: Set of three questions about role and involvement in research process**

- I**                      How would you describe your role in this research process that you got involved in, and how have you seen me coming to classes, and ‘hanging around’, and doing the interviews?
  
- II**                     Why did you agree to being interviewed, and what is it that you wanted to give in the interviews, and is there anything that you are gaining from the interviews?
  
- III**                    What would you like the focus group to be like, what kind of atmosphere, what kind of issues would you like to be raised?

#### **Appendix 3.4:**

##### **First interviews: Opening questions to the participant MA students**

(Extract from Harry's 1st interview, p.1)

MH: Thanks for coming. What I am interested in is what is going on in a multi-cultural group of mature students, in which most of the students have come to Britain from a totally different environment, with different background experience, everything. And then they are in a group, sometimes unexpectedly facing problems. So this is what I'm interested in, things to do with identity, language and learning, and this, and everything that is interesting to you is what matters to me.

### **Appendix 3.5:**

#### **Second interviews: Set of three questions about experience of doing MA course**

- I                      What comes to your mind when you think of yourself using English, when you are speaking or writing in English?
  
- II                     What is it that you want from the course, and what is it that you think you bring to the course, what is it that you can “offer”?
  
- III                    How would you describe the value of the course to you? What is it that you think you are achieving?

# Appendix 3.6: First interviews: Handwritten response by participant MA student

, please think of a name for me to use as a pseudonym for you:

.....Harry.....

Could you please describe your teaching background in a few words:

.....Penny.....  
.....d. E. F. L.....  
.....Nonington (Spangish)...students...mostly...adults...at in Europe...  
.....

## First interview:

- Thanks for coming. What I am interested in is what is going on in a multi-cultural group of mature students, in which most of the students have come to Britain from a totally different environment, with different background experience, everything. And then they are in a group, sometimes unexpectedly facing problems. So this is what I'm interested in, things to do with identity, language, learning, all this, and everything that is interesting to you is what matters to me.

- All right. Ehm, well, the first thing that I most notice about it is how, in whatever group I've been in on this course, the people who tend to contribute the most are the sort of 'the English people'. And, ehm, and it's almost, because the teachers come from the same sort of background on the whole, all being English (INAUDIBLE), then they, I'm sure they, ehm, what's the word, it's as if they are teaching almost to the English people, rather than to the other, I mean, not consciously, but just because there is a lot more sort of shared knowledge, I think.

- Do you think that students are aware of this?

- Ehm, yes, I'm sure, I don't know, it's difficult. At the beginning of the course, everyone sort of feels uncomfortable, I think, about contributing, And contribution, you know, sort of contributing in order, because you've got something to say, I don't think, it's sort of a, it's because you feel, you know, you ought



Appendix 3.7: Handwritten note at the back  
of the last page of a participant  
MA student's first interview transcript

Continuation: what does it achieve?

: Lechner's 'method' - is it best?

Group work - problems

### **Appendix 3.8:**

#### **Focus group: Invitation to focus group discussion**

4 August 199..

Dear .....,

I would like to invite you to the focus group discussion on 16 August 199.. at 2pm at Riverside University. The discussion will take place in (location, room number address). Please find attached a paper telling you about different ways of getting there.

I will be there to meet you from 1.30pm, and there will be coffee, tea, and cold drinks available from the refectory (3rd floor, closing time 2pm) to refresh you or to warm you up, depending on the weather and on how you look at it.

Assuming that you can come, you might like to think about what will happen in the focus group. Here is an extract from one of the interviews when I asked the question:

MH: What would you want this focus group to be like?

.....: Yeah, I would very much like to have people from ... here, because I'd like to know what their experiences are as people studying in a different British institution from the one that I am studying in, so that I could know whether what I experienced they too are also experiencing, so really I would like to have them here, and again I would like a friendly environment. I mean I would like everybody to see the focus group as something not intimidating, as a place where people are just going to say whatever they have in mind about the courses that they have gone through without having to make, to offend anybody, you know, just, and everybody really shouldn't be defensive about anything, because people would just be saying, I think people would just be saying their experiences. At least this is what I'm going to do, to just say my experiences, and that's not to try and apportion blame on anybody, which will just be a way of saying what I have experienced in the course. And I hope that will be the spirit. And even if somebody comes up with a different view, it's their own experience, I mean I can't expect them to have a similar experience just like myself, because we look at things differently.

(quoted by permission from one of the interviews)

During the focus group discussion I might use some of the quotes that you have allowed me to use in order to stimulate the discussion. The focus will be on what has been said, and it might be interesting for you to think about what others are saying, and to express your own views or ideas.

I have asked a former MA student colleague of mine, whom I had interviewed last year for my MA research project, to moderate this focus group discussion. His concern will be to lead through the talk in a way that allows everybody to listen to each other, and to take the opportunity to comment on what has been said, or to come up with own ideas. You will be in a position to decide to what degree you want to participate actively.

After the focus group discussion I will do my best to transcribe the talk, so that you can read it before you finish your course and tell me whether there is anything of what you say during the discussion that you would not feel happy about if I was to quote it in my research project.

I hope very much that you will be able to afford the time on the 16 August. I am looking forward to seeing you, but if for any reason you will not be able to participate in the focus group discussion, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for the time you spent talking to me, for your trust, and for your interest in that research project.

Very best wishes

Monika Hermerschmidt

**Appendix 3.9: Table of total hours of interviews and focus group discussion taped and transcribed:**

<i>Alex</i> 1st interview 2nd interview  total	32 mins 51 mins  83 mins
<i>Alison</i> 1st interview 2nd interview  total	30 mins 64 mins  94 mins
<i>Ann</i> 1st interview 2nd interview  total	33 mins 42 mins  75 mins
<i>Blanche</i> 1st interview 2nd interview  total	34 mins 37 mins  71 mins
<i>Bob</i> 1st interview 2nd interview  total	31 mins 52 mins  83 mins
<i>Francisco</i> 1st interview 2nd interview 3rd interview  total	30 mins 42 mins 85 mins  157 mins
<i>Harry</i> 1st interview 2nd interview  total	31 mins 48 mins  79 mins
<i>John</i> 1st interview 2nd interview  total	31 mins 40 mins  71 mins
<i>Linda</i> 1st interview 2nd interview  total	30 mins 63 mins  93 mins
<i>Maya</i> 1st interview 2nd interview  total	24 mins 50 mins  74 mins
<i>Rachael</i> 1st interview 2nd interview  total	33 mins 74 mins  107 mins
<i>Zaitun</i> 1st interview 2nd interview  total	22 mins 30 mins  52 mins
<b>First and second interviews</b>	1,039 mins = 17 hours, 19 mins
<i>Alex, Alison, John, Linda, Maya, Rachael</i>  Focus group discussion	106 mins = 1 hour, 46 mins
<b>Total</b>	<b>19 hours, 5 mins</b>



## FOCUSGROUP DISCUSSION

### LANGUAGE

if you don't speak anything, people think you don't think anything

it's not just the idea of native speakers dominating a particular group. It's a certain group of people who tell themselves that they can dominate the other people, the rest of the people in the group

it ends up like the course is for certain people, because even if you could be there, and you see yourselves as part of the group, and somehow ... somebody doesn't recognize you as an equal, you kind of get demoralized, and it can be demotivating to a great extent

when I speak English, I just don't want to change a lot, maybe I need to speak up, or I should interrupt, but sometimes my culture, or identity, doesn't allow me to do it, because I can pretend to be another person maybe for a while, but I don't want to be a totally different person

there were some students who hardly ever said a word, but who when maybe I had a chance to speak to outside class, I could realize that they had wonderful ideas that they could bring forward, but for one reason or the other they just decided not to talk in class

sometimes I think I'm a bit too conscious of my differences instead of focussing on the similarities

(I would not like to have more presentations), because you've got to get up and do it, ... it's like a test, ... just as everybody will see if you, if you really are a good teacher, or presenter, or whatever



we are not all chatting in a cafeteria, we are in a position of ... student - teacher, ... we've been put in that role here, and so therefore he has to play his part, and appear to value what we say, otherwise we might never say anything again

respect to me doesn't come from a cultural conditioning, it doesn't come from outside myself, I respect that individual, not their status

## LEARNING

at the beginning of the course, everyone sort of feels uncomfortable about contributing - it's because you feel you ought to contribute something. And so it's the English people who tend to be able to do this. ... I'm sure that people who ... come from other countries, they must be conscious of the fact that they are not as able to contribute. ... And the other English people ... they might just wonder why the foreigners aren't contributing

I'd like the ability to contribute not to depend on things like gender, or race, or language. But it could depend on your interest in the subject, or how much you'd read about the subject, or if you had thought about the subject. That's the sort of thing that it should depend on, because if it doesn't, then you will get maybe one or two people who contribute for the sake of contributing.

that group had a lot of potential, just for the people within it, and getting to know people more, and yet now that we are at the end of the course, we didn't have much chance somehow

the more you attend the lecture, the more you can notice, of course, some people make a good point, and a very clever point and we should share that opinion, but sometimes people just talk before they think ... we can't do that

Sometimes I just loose the opportunity ... and next moment topic is different.

we don't have ... a very deep idea of culture ... cultural learning would be very important

we share our knowledge, we share our experience, and also our culture ..., especially with the ones with (whom) I feel quite close

I just offer the opportunity to speak to others. But if, for example, others ask me to say the result of the discussions, so I will tell.

mature students should study independently, because I don't ... see the point why we should create problems for each other here

I feel more as a student, I think I've almost forgotten how I felt as a teacher, ... because I don't feel like I have much responsibility in arranging what goes on in the classroom

## TEACHING

some of the lecturers are very good at taking everyones comments, and accepting everyone's comments, and letting everyone have the chance to speak, and ... not sort of judging what people say, or letting other people comment on it. So to that extent, I suppose, they are trying, they are catering for the fact that there is the sort of culture, that is here isn't what everybody is used to

you want to be impressed by the person who is talking, you want them to be really brilliant. At the same time, if they are too brilliant, ... then it's a bit restricting, because nobody really dares to say anything. You just sit there and worship them



(the way you do it here is) not that structured, some of the tutors just touch like main points, and expand on that points, but you don't quite get the whole picture at the time, you know, and then that's what you have to guess, you know, look for and read about ... I guess that's the way tutors give their talks, or lectures or whatever, and I assume that they think they are doing the right thing

in the classroom, I sometimes feel I'm a teacher, and I feel uncomfortable, because some teacher give us too much time to do what they call the kind of workshop, or seminar. In that case I feel I'm a teacher, because I know that the teacher is playing about the time ... it seems that he or she does not have anything to say

sometimes it is a problem, because I feel that I wasted a lot of time by sitting here ... and it is not challenging at all

I like teachers talking, I like teachers giving their input, because I think we are old enough ... it's not a matter of age, we are academically mature enough to filter it. I would like many more times my teacher to say: 'well, I think this is A and B, and not C and D, and the reasons why I believe this are the following'. And not this feeling of uncertainty around everything, they don't want to impose any view on you.

## THE MASTER'S DEGREE

What did I expect from the course? Well, at least a piece of paper at the end of it!

They take your money after all, that's what you pay for: insights and a piece of paper.

people are used to a sort of English university set-up, so occasionally you'll get someone, someone from a different culture, ... who is prepared to contribute a lot, ... that this person is sort of missing the mark ..., and I suppose they do get judged

people notice people who are contributing, and so if I wanted to be noticed then I ought to contribute something ..., but after a term or so, I don't sort of feel that intimidation in the same way

the teachers come from the same sort of background, all being English ..., it's as if they are teaching almost to the English people, just because there is a lot more sort of shared knowledge

in front of those same theorists you're wary, because they just might be able to sort of stick the knife in at you with some superior, kind of well articulated theory or statistic or whatever that you can't really deal with or combat. They've still got that image of being a higher, a higher elite, ... and people who get to be professors and lecturers, especially in a prestigious institution, I suppose you just always ... feel you haven't read enough, or done enough research

the expectations are so different from my home country, I think the conventions are very different. Now I don't know if this is because this is Master's degree level, I have never done a Master's degree course before. It could be that there are a lot more similarities than I realise



## Appendix 3.10 (page 6 of 6)

as a student you don't really have the power ... it's the people in charge who have the power, and you want the MA degree, so you've got to play it by their rules

tutors need to take ... more responsibility for how we feel in the classroom ... on the one hand, they will react like they are very much in favour of being learner centred, but I don't think they really are. I don't think that the tutors take enough account of our feelings

being constantly bombarded by readings, assignments, the sense you have is a little bit shell-shocked, you are being bombarded, and that interferes with your learning ..., because you don't have time to digest things

the way the institution operates, or the department operates, I don't think it allows for that ... you even give up before trying ... the fact that I'm dissatisfied about this and that, it doesn't really make a difference, because even if I were to tell them, the thing is, will they do anything about it? So you just end up keeping quiet about it. Not that it's something that is not important to you, but because you ask yourself whether it's worth it at all to mention it

people should realize that this is a course more along the lines of self- development. I mean, it doesn't just have to centre around people looking at grades

for me it's kind of difficult to find the things for myself, kind of guess what you're supposed to know, to learn, and come up with it

if I was at home, I wouldn't be thinking seriously about some of the things that I think about while I'm here. So the distance in itself has had an impact on the way I think

See also Appendix 7.2: Student writing-story (diagram)

Student:

What I try to do in this diagram is express the different contexts in which I believe I'm immersed. I have like three of those circles are for each of these big contexts. The first, which is public policy, is the last context in which I've been involved. And I've been involved there as a professional because I've been working lately in an NGO where we do research on public policy in different provinces of my country. So my link with that special sphere is, more than anything, professional, although we are doing some kind of academic work because our research there is quite academic. It's more focused on trying to think of alternative policies, and of solutions, and actions. That's why here, when I wrote public policy, NGO – professional community – solutions and actions. Because the main point there is thinking about that.

My second context would be sociology. That is where I studied; I studied in the University of Buenos Aires. I did a degree in sociology. Sociology there takes six years of studying, so you get involved in an academic community while studying. And I also have done a lot of research in the university. And there the focus of that context is more like macro-processes in education and society. I specialized myself in education. As I was studying sociology, I was also immersing myself in sociology of education. And there it was more like an academic community and what we were trying to do, when we were writing, was doing critiques and understanding more than trying to think of solutions and actions to take.

And the last context would be the educational context. I don't know if that is the right name. Well, 'education' because the first thing I did when I finished high school was to study to become a teacher. I did a degree to become a teacher. In my country, the degree to become a teacher and to become a sociolog(ist) is in two different institutions, which are a different context, in a way. Because as a teacher you are not supposed to be involved in an academic context. I mean it's just like a more practical context and the focus would be on learning, and teaching issues, or organisational or institutional perspectives. It's not like the relationships between – you wouldn't think there of social class or gender, or relationships between education and society. You would just think about what's the best way of teaching this or that, what are the context, the contents that you're going to be teaching and that.

So these are like the three main contexts. At the same time I realize that within these different contexts there are a lot of contradictions too. One of those, for example, is the one when you work in public policy from an



NGO and when you work in public policy through the state, or within the state. There the main contradiction would be: When you work in an NGO you can criticize a lot of what is done in the state and you can propose solutions. When you work in the state and you write academic(ally), well, within the state you are probably more cautious when to criticise, and how to do it, and ... because you are part of that state and of that present, I mean, you are part of that group that is implementing that policy, probably. So you wouldn't like to say that is all wrong. While if you are in an NGO you can be more severe with your critiques.

And, well, at the same time, this diagram here on the right is also like a policy spectrum because I believe that in any of these contexts and within this different contexts you have like a policy, like more a politic(al) way in which you focus what you do. And that would be like thinking of left-wing, or right-wing, or more center-wing, and where you stand up when you think of society, if you are like more neo-liberal, or you think more that a welfare state is better for organizing social issues. And I think this spectrum is crossing each one of the, of this different contexts. Although perhaps in the educational context we don't see it as much, because we tend to think that teachers are more neutral, and they are not, like they are not teaching in a, in a politic(al) spectrum but they are, they are.

And here on the bottom of the diagram, I wrote different ways of writing, regarding time, ways of writing, objectives and conclusions. And I wrote this specially for professional and academic community because those are the places where I have been involved in writing. And I haven't been involved in writing when I was a teacher, or when I was studying to become a teacher. And this two different contexts have many different things, for example, one of the things I noticed is that when you're working in the public policy context you have less time than when you work in an academic community. For example, things that we used to do in three months, in an academic community you could do them in eight months, or nine months. You had a lot more time to do research, fieldwork, and of writing and thinking, and giving your papers to some other person to read, and going back to it. And when I worked in the NGO we had like very different time tables to complete. And usually we had one month for each of the, I don't know, of the documents. And if we didn't finish, we just hand in what we had and that was published. Although, perhaps, it needed more, or it would have been great to have more time, but as you have to focus on more things, you'd have less time, I guess.

Another thing is ways of writing. And that would be like the people that you choose to reference and the vocabulary that you would use. When you usually write in academic writing in, well, specially in the University of Buenos Aires, you would use a lot of different words, explaining what

they mean, and concepts. And when you write in public policy that depends to whom you write. And, but if you're writing a document and you want policy makers and people from the educational system to read, you wouldn't use those terms. Because they are too complicated and they tend to confuse the reader more than giving them help in understanding.

Another thing is the objectives and this is related to this idea of solutions and actions, or critique and understanding. Like one is more focused on solutions and the other on understanding and, at the same time, on critique. And the conclusions are also related to that, to that or finding solutions, or finding, or saying this is all wrong. That would be more or less the idea. I don't know if there is anything else you would like to know.

Monika:

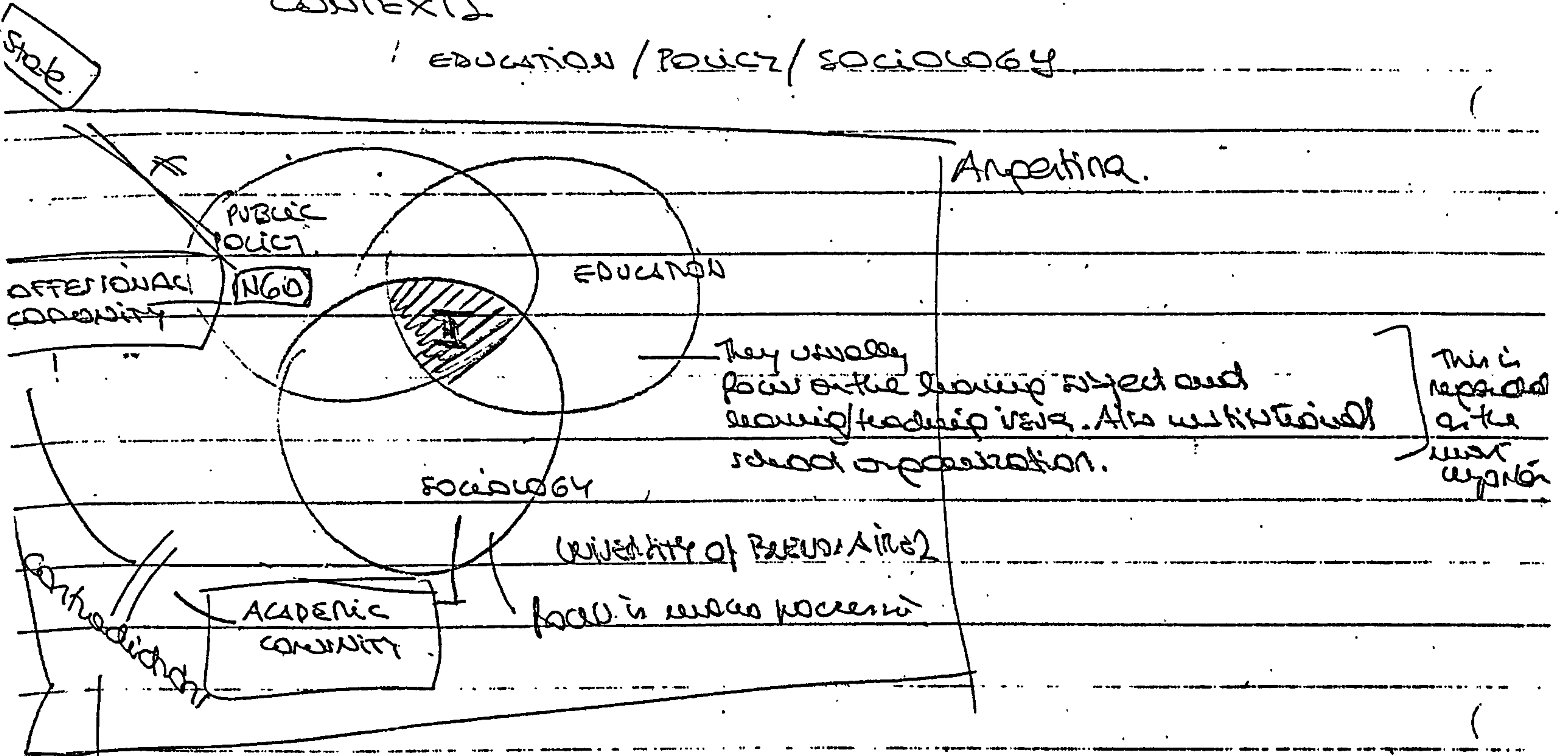
No, that is really great. You have said, I think, more or less exactly the same as you did in the seminar, last week. And I hope that, you know, if I get a chance to play your tape to the students in another group, that it would help them to explore their contexts in similar ways. So that they can work out some of those differences that impact on their writing. You know, obviously, it will look differently for them but listening to you could help them see how context is actually implicated in the writing that they do. So I am grateful to you, thank you very much for coming.



# **TEXT BOUND INTO THE SPINE**

# Appendix 7.2: Student writing-story (diagram)

## CONTEXTS



CONTROL  $\Rightarrow$  depends on how you think of control.

WRITING  
READING  $\Rightarrow$  Juggle from everyone  $\neq$  things.  
Usually are more linked to critical analysis and research.

POWER SPECTRUM (Arg and this world)

